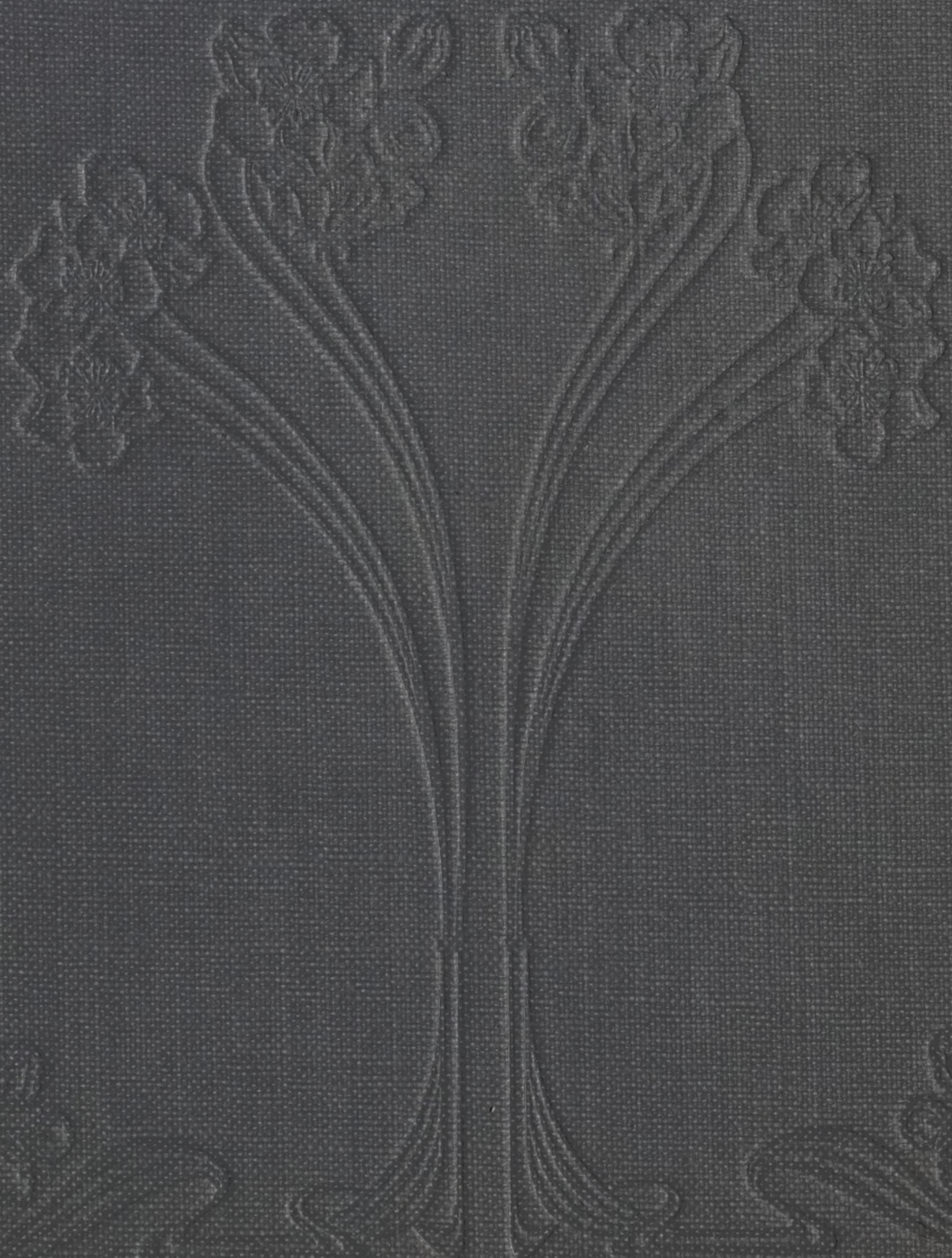


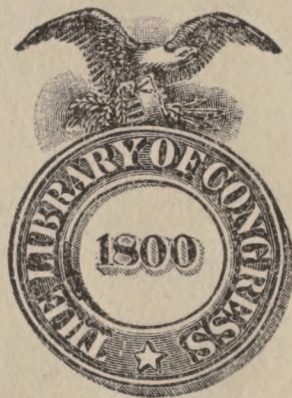
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"She would often play for her guests and callers, and hearing her play was the chief charm about their visits."
Page 13.

Svensson, Hilda

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THE STORY OF A PARISH

RENDERED FROM THE SWEDISH

OF

HILLIS GRANE *7 p. 100*

BY

ERNST W. OLSON



ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS
AUGUSTANA BOOK CONCERN

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I.

The Solitude

A GREAT, oppressive silence rested over the extensive church parish — the silence and quietude of death. Dark and ominous, it brooded on the deep forests, the broad, desolate, pathless moors and marshes, where bogs and fens and quagmires lurked at every turn. A dense fog often rose out of the soggy lowlands, enveloping the region as in a dark veil. The early autumn nights frequently undid the work of all the toilsome days of spring and summer by bringing in the wake of the dismal mists from the swamps disastrous frosts which blighted the fields while the grain was still growing.

On the scattered farms and in sparse clearings the children of this great solitude toiled on in gloomy reticence. Men of few words were those who tilled the impoverished soil, their backs prematurely bent by too hard work. Women with silent tongues and heavy hearts went their

daily round of monotonous toil. Mothers did not smile over the crib of their last-born — tired mothers, knowing, as they did, that this meant another mouth to feed and just so much added to their grueling household cares. The father of a newborn babe had no smile for the infant, and scarcely cast a glance in the direction of the cradle. Why should he? The little mite meant nothing to him until it could begin to give an account of itself.

Man and wife spoke little with one another, and were never known to exchange smiles. And why, indeed, should they? Life to them was one endless workaday grind. There was not the faintest tinge of holiday glamour about it; only work, work; no joy, and yet no very profound sorrow. For when should a mother smile, if not at her child's cradle? And a wife who could note with indifference that her husband's pulls at the rum bottle grew more frequent and indispensable as the years passed, and that he grew wild, depraved, and bestial by stages, what, forsooth, could cause such a one true sorrow?

Silence ruled everywhere in this desolate solitude. Only the rapids and falls of the river murmured and roared, and in the great silence the voice of the waters seemed like the cry of the wild, the pleading of all nature for redemption from the burden of men's sins and crimes.

When in early spring the waters roared most fiercely, as they rushed foaming through the wilderness, like beasts of prey frothing at the mouth, the whole region was filled with the angry cry of the torrents for miles around. Then

a sense of mute fear or dull anguish would sometimes grip these callous plodders; — for an instant the women would drop their work and listen as if in dread of some unknown peril, while in those days the men bent more desperately to their task, or cheered their sinking spirits by consulting the pocket flask or the demijohn with greater frequency.

In the springtime roar the oldest inhabitants thought they heard woodland voices foretelling some dire disaster, or the hoarse and hollow laughter of the evil-minded spirits of the primeval forest. People who dwelt near bogs and quagmires would often be alarmed by uncanny noises and frightful shrieks from points where the green surface offered no firm foothold but yielded treacherously to the tread of man or beast, and where many who had gone astray on foggy days or dark nights had disappeared never to be seen or heard of again.

It was a God-forsaken parish, whose ill repute had spread far and wide throughout the province. People had many tales to tell of grewsome crimes committed in the depths of these forests, terrible acts of violence, man against man, which were never found out and never punished. It seemed as though this particular locality was beyond the reach of the arm of the law.

After the death of the old parson, it created not a little surprise when Dean Malm, a learned man and a powerful preacher, was named among the candidates at the coming pastoral election; for that able divine was held eligible to a much higher and more desirable place. Still he

applied, with the result that he became the unanimous choice of the parish.

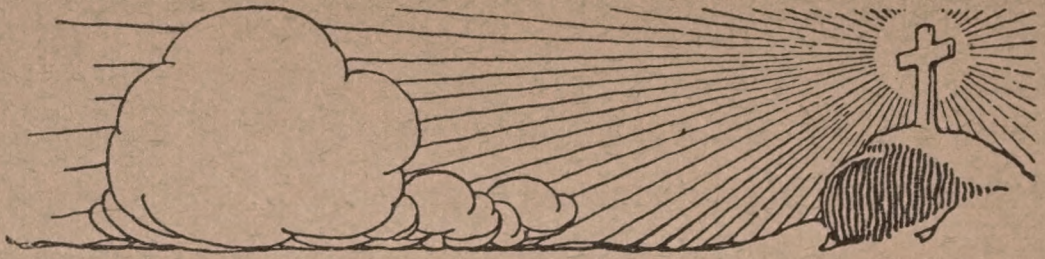
Of Dean Hans Malm sundry favorable reports had long been going the rounds of the neighborhood. It was reputed that his father was of an old peasant family and had with his own hands broken ground and worked up a farmstead in a barren and unpromising locality. The son of such a father would suit them best as pastor; so him they chose. And when afterward they saw him in the pulpit, a tall, imposing figure, they liked him from the very first. He impressed them. They wanted a real man in the pulpit, a man sprung from plain folk, yet risen far above them, a man with a serious mind, to whom they could look up with confident fellow feeling; and just such a man was Dean Malm.

When he preached his probation sermon, there happened something quite out of the ordinary. Every man and woman in the great church listened. They had to listen. He gripped them and held them bound with his fine voice and his plainspoken, homely eloquence; but his power over them was perhaps in greater measure the power of a man of men, who at once made them feel that he was one of them. He too had heard the voice of the solitude, the roar of the rapids; he too knew what life meant to the dwellers in the lone forest clearings; how long and dreary were their days of never ending toil. To ring in a holiday in the parish and attune the people's minds to the voice of divine truth was his one wish. He

would lighten the yoke, cheer the faint and burdened plodders, and turn their earthbound eyes towards the sun of life.

They listened, breathless, spellbound, rapt in wonder. It seemed to their benighted minds like the first streak of a new dawn.





II.

The New Parson

Shortly after Dean Malm's election to this charge, the old tumble-down parsonage was torn down, and a new, stately manse was reared as a home for the new minister. True, he was one of them, that they maintained; yet he was their leader and bore himself with a dignity that called for a house somewhat better than the rest in order to be in full keeping. He was such a tall, grand man; so his doors must be a little higher. His face was light and his disposition cheerful; so his windows ought to be a little wider. And for a man with such a big heart the rooms should be made spacious and ample; so the new manse was built accordingly. Expecting much of him, the parishioners gave with a round hand towards his domestic comfort.

When he moved into this new home, radiant with manly pride and happiness, and turned it over to his blushing young bride, there appeared to be an end of the deathlike quietude that had pervaded this secluded parish

from time out of mind. The people welcomed the twain as the accepted messengers of spring and sunshine, and there was no end of hurrahing for the happy pair, and other modes of rejoicing to make them welcome. More or less consciously, the whole parish sensed the coming of a new and better time.

They were waiting with open and expectant hearts, and the parson and his wife met them more than halfway. The two had come to them with open hands and hearts, with a will to turn darkness into light, to make the wilderness to bloom like a garden.

The young parson was a man of common stock, of popular leanings, but he might never have become a minister but for receiving through the young woman who afterwards became his wife his predestined call. He would doubtless have become a scientist, had not she given his mind a different turn by guiding him into the sunlit paths of true life, filling his soul with visions of the way of the Master and the will to follow in His steps. To do so was to take from the Master's hand and give to his fellow men — a perpetual receiving and distributing of heavenly gifts. It meant to penetrate to the very depths of the human mind, to study the true inwardness of the human heart, to take seriously the words of the poet, "The proper study of mankind is man", and to dedicate his life to the service of mankind and of God.

The two newcomers saw with clear eyes the true condition of the parish. They understood the gloom, the

silence, the poverty of the people; they knew why the women had grown cold, and were lacking in sympathy and love for their near ones; why the appetite of the men was debased and their thirst for strong drink year by year grew all the harder to appease. The drift was but natural, and there were no forces at work to stem the downward tide.

The pastor and his young wife looked at their bright new home with smiling eyes, as if it had been the unlooked for gift of some miserly old uncle. They threw the doors wide ajar to their parishioners, observing with joy how well pleased their frequent visitors seemed to be. The parson could talk understandingly with all who came, now about their daily work or neighborly disagreements, now about their bodily ailments or mental afflictions. He was familiar with all the ins and outs of the life of the country folk, — that they quickly discovered. And when conversation along these lines lagged, he would tell them about his own father and his forbears, who had been farmers for generations back, great workers and masterly farmers at that.

All this inspired confidence. If any other "gentleman" had acted as did the parson, the peasants would have met his confidential approaches with stubborn suspicion. But this man, who spoke so openly and with such manifest pride in his peasant origin, in him they had implicit faith.

Then there was his kind, sweet young wife, who received the peasantry most heartily, chatted pleasantly with

them, and proved a most charming hostess to all comers. She was a sweet and refined little person of delicate mold and light, ethereal presence, and a cast of countenance so attractive and soulful that these children of the backwoods lingered long and often in abstract admiration of it. When they took her slender hand in greeting, they pressed it gently and with seeming hesitation, as if in fear of crushing it.

There was something about this little woman's very person suggestive of an irradiation of light and purity. Her eyes sparkled starlike, and every feature of her face reflected the emotions of a noble, tender heart. Now that she devoted herself wholly to the task of giving the people of her husband's parish an impression of light and purity, she seemed in some mysterious way to give out light and exhale purity from her very person.

Many a visitor returned home remembering little of what had been said, but bearing a most vivid recollection of a pair of eyes with a bright and tender twinkle in them, and of a subtle brightness that was somehow imparted to them, cheering and illuminating their joyless selves. There was one thing more they could not forget. That was her music. She would often play for her guests and callers, and hearing her play was the chief charm about their visits; in fact, to many it seemed the supreme moment of their life. If she failed to convey in words her sympathy with some visitor who came to confide to the parson's wife her joy or sorrow, she possessed the

great art of interpreting in tones her profoundest and tenderest feelings. With her music she exerted a resistless power over them. With that fairy wand she was able to waft them at will higher and higher, into supernal realms far above this groveling life and the cares that infest the day. Was that realm heaven? Thus many of them began to wonder.

In those fanciful flights on the wings of harmony, they thought they saw endless space, heard celestial music, saw divine light, felt a foretaste of eternal rest and peace. Those who heard that music could never forget it. Its strains followed them to their homes; they rang through the solitude and silence of the forest; they sounded again when the winds picked the strings of the woodland harps; they enlivened the dull monotony of the daily round, and quickened the sluggish pulse of the inner life. With such music ringing in the ears, it was not quite so easy to put the bottle to one's mouth, or to curse and quarrel in the home. When they felt tempted to do that, they had a mysterious sensation as of tender eyes watching them or pure ears listening near. Was it angels sent to guard them, or was it the subtle influence of the fairylike little woman in the parsonage that hovered about?

The burdens of life seemed to have been lightened. Father and mother began to talk things over together. On Sundays there was a pretty general attendance at church, making it the great day of the week. Formerly there had been no real holiday in the parish. People

began to gather at the church on Sundays for other purposes besides hearing Dean Malm preach; there they met their friends, heard the latest news, and had a chance to shake hands with the parson and his wife.

Which of the two was most admired by the people it were hard to tell. Both were highly esteemed, and the love and kindness they dispensed among their people came back to them in the form of gratitude, this they felt particularly when surrounded by the throng of churchgoers on Sunday mornings.

The spring that followed the advent of the new minister at the parish was one of unusual charm and delight. The song of the rapids ran in a different key; the sun beamed down over the region more benignly than ever before; the air of the forest was surcharged with sweet fragrance, and who had ever heard the birds in such a riot of song?

Up to this time no one but the head of the family had ever been known to visit the parson; but from now on there were frequent occasions for bringing some little gift or favor to the parsonage, and who but the goodwife herself should make the presentation?

Thus it came about that the mistress of the house, too, had dealings with the manse, and established heretofore unknown relations with the parson and his wife, the latter now giving the lion's share of attention to the good housewives whose generosities were literally heaped upon her household. She talked sympathetically with them about

their children, dwelling fondly upon the great blessing of motherhood and the high responsibility of right bringing up. Her warm words and intelligent outlook upon woman's true mission in life aroused within them something which had lain dormant before, that part of the motherly instinct known as kindness.

This little gentlewoman of the manse had come like a mother to them all, and however generous their own material favors to her, she seemed to give them, out of the largeness of her heart, greater things in return. In consequence, her visitors would oftentimes depart with grateful tears lurking under the lashes and a distinct inner sensation that life, after all, was worth the living, and that the dismal days of lovelessness were past. Toil and cares and heartaches would always be theirs as a matter of course, but they could now see it all in a brighter light.

Nevertheless, when she sat in the living room playing to herself there stole into her music at times a subtle something which her husband was unable to understand, while still reacting to it with a shuddering sense of agony. Such chords he had never heard before, he thought. Granted that they were both overjoyed with expectation of a coming event, yet her strange, distraught harmonies seem to open a gap between them.

"How now, little wife? You are well, I trust," he would then interrupt.

"Oh — indeed, Hans, I am too happy for *words*", came the half-whispered reply, while she fondly inclined

her slightly flushed cheek to his shoulder and her tender eyes avoided his.

“May I not look at you, then?” he demanded as he gently turned her face upward and looked squarely into her eyes. There he saw reflected a world of purity and bliss, and back of it all an ominous expression, the meaning of which was strange to him.





III.

Life for Life

Ascension Day had come — a day of joy in all nature, when buds were bursting into blossom, the sap was rising and stirring vegetation to new life, and the spring birds were voicing the joy of life in matutinal song. The great church was thronged with parishioners come to worship, a thing which by now had become a habit with them. Parson Malm, alert with a secret expectation, put more heart and hope into his preaching than ever before, inspired in no small part by the radiant face of his wife before him. At times he seemed to forget all those around him and address his words to her alone.

As they walked across the church lawn, Dean Malm heard an echo of his sermon repeated behind him. "And His face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light." As he looked into his wife's face, he was prompted to apply the words to her, such was the exultation that radiated from her countenance. A look

of dismay followed soon after, and the parson, who understood, would have given much at that moment to have his wife at home.

It was but a little way to the parsonage, ordinarily; to-day the distance seemed endless. His little wife bore up bravely and had a greeting and a cheerful word for all who spoke, but at the front steps her strength gave out.

"Hans, you will carry me in, won't you?" she begged; "I can't walk another step".

He turned and looked at her face again. The radiance was now gone; all that remained was agonized pallor. —

During the next few days the news went the rounds of the parish that there were no longer two at the parsonage — there were four, the new arrivals being two little cherubs, a boy and a girl, both with the starlike eyes of their mother.

Man and wife about the parish would exchange mysterious smiles as they talked over the good news. The mothers would look tenderly at their last-born, with a feeling akin to that of the happy young mother in the parsonage. They would smile inwardly in recalling all her kind words and her all-embracing love. Why, this little woman had been a mother long ere this, a mother to all of these wayward children of the backwoods!

But now she had been blessed with children of her own flesh and blood, doubly blessed. And why not doubly? For she had spoken to them more fervently than anyone else about this very thing — the blessedness of parenthood

and true home life. In many a home the mothers' eyes were dimmed with tears of solicitude for the dear little woman, every thought of whom they were wont to supplement with an informal prayer — "God bless her".

It was a day of rejoicing for the entire parish when the glad news spread from the parsonage. But it was to be followed by days of grief and sad disappointment, for next came a message that the mother's benign eyes were closed, — her kind heart was stilled in death. On the day when that message came, no one did a hand's turn of work, not a plow was put in the ground, not an ax was swung, — all were steeped in gloom. People spoke in a hushed voice, if speak they must; beyond that the whole parish was wrapped in a great, mysterious silence. No one talked about these events; all seemed to be pondering them in their own minds. The men would stand at the windows as if expecting word that the message of death was not true. The women tended their little ones with the same tenderness they felt for the infants of that young mother who had loved them so; who had put into their simple lives that which could not be spoken, nor assayed, nor yet requited.

But the old folk who sat in the ingle nooks, the knowing ones who understood more than the younger generation, claimed to hear the mocking laughter of the Lady of the Woods and to perceive mystic sounds from the moors foreboding evil. There had been no mistake, — the parson's wife was dead. It was as if the sun in the

heavens had suddenly grown dark, or the bounteous promises of spring had been undone by a killing frost.

It was a remarkable procession that followed the parson's wife to the grave. First came the parson himself, bowed, yet tall, his serious face more stern and gloomy than ever before. Then followed relatives of the deceased, fine folks from the city, in deep mourning apparel and with floods of tears. After them, the whole congregation in mourning, men, women, and children, people from the secluded crofts in the forest clearings, and from the little huts around the moors, many of them being without holiday clothes, yet anxious to come and show deference to her who had passed from them, to see her casket, and to mourn beside her grave.

There was silence, there was grief which found no voice, profound beyond comprehension. A harp was shattered whose tones had set the mute strings of many another harp in sympathetic vibration. These had begun to sound in one grand accord, ever louder and stronger, when the leading instrument was so suddenly hushed. Its chords stilled forever, all music seemed to have died out of the world.

In the house of mourning all spoke in a half whisper as if in fear of waking one who sleeps. And when Miss Rosa came to take charge of the house, the rule was established as a matter of good form that thenceforward none but subdued voices should be heard in the rooms which had heretofore resounded with laughter and music.

The parson himself locked his wife's piano; no one should ever be permitted to use it after *her*.

With her the music had gone out of his life; there was now nothing left to him but stern duty, work, and solitude. He sat alone in his study, alone with his memories. No one disturbed him needlessly; with a reverence mingled with timidity the people looked up to this lonely man, so prematurely turning gray. He fought hard to seem the same as before, but those who came to him saw the great void, and hesitated to come again.

Thus sat Dean Malm alone with his heart's grief, reviewing his past life again and again, reveling in self-contemplation, and growing blind to the outer world as he kept peering into his own inwardness. Ever and anon his thoughts reverted to her who had left him a lone and grief-stricken man. Her words had been so few to the last, as she had lain on her bed pale and white, with eyes closed. When spoken to, she had opened her eyes and looked into his with infinite depth and tenderness, but with a far-away expression, as if she saw something beyond him, an all-absorbing vision which caused his person to vanish from her sight.

"Hans", she had whispered to him once, "I see the springtime coming, — spring and sunshine for you and all those in your charge here. Spring is coming", she repeated with assurance, — "even though belated."

"Abide with me, dear heart; then there is spring and sunshine," he entreated.

A shadow flitted across her countenance, and she lay a long while silent. Then her features lit up with a sublime light.

"Hans, my own," she faltered, and it was with some difficulty he caught her words, "there has been something in my life, — in *our* life — which has borne me up, a great, bright, beautiful something; a sweet harmony seemed to surround me at all times. There is no name for it, — words fail me to describe it, it is so pure, so sacred. In music alone I was at all able to interpret it. Dearest, when you shall have learnt to know that great thing, then springtime shall have come into your life."

He studied and pondered her words, but their meaning remained hidden. Unable to find a solution, he abandoned contemplation and threw himself into the parish work with full energy. But he made no headway. It was like beating with bare fists upon copper gates locked against him. While all had been bright and pleasant in his home, he had succeeded without great effort, as though some one had gone before him and made a way. Now all doors seemed closed to him.

He seized upon study and research as a last recourse against despair.





IV.

After Twenty Years

The only two-story house in the parish was the parsonage. The homes in the district were generally poorly built; a low dwelling house, a straw-thatched, sway-backed barn, and one or two rickety little outhouses, that was all. No need of expertness to see that the soil was being but poorly tilled, yielding little, or there would have been signs of thrift and prosperity at least in places. Nor was it necessary to interview the parishioners to find out that their inner life was in keeping with this outward decay. A look at the parish schoolhouse was enough, for it was the poorest structure for miles around, leaning on props like a cripple on his crutches, sagging, leaky, and sadly out of repair. And if you made an inspection of the ancient church, with its walls covered with decades of dust, where they were not denuded in patches of fallen plastering, and the interior sparsely lit up by the dim, thick-glazed, cloistral windows, you no longer wondered at what you had

seen about the parish. All things were in full keeping. Not even the fact that but one grave in the cemetery was being well kept gave cause for wonder. Any stranger would have surmised that some one from the parsonage slept there.

And if you approached that grave and read the inscription on the stone, you found that it was the resting place of the parson's wife. She had now slept there for twenty years, and among all these dead hers was the only name preserved for posterity.

It was with a sense of oppression one walked about in this city of unknown dead. These people, who permitted the grass to grow tall on the graves of their departed ones, who gave not so much as a flower in tribute to those claimed by death, even at a time when all nature was abloom, — what sort of people could they be? And furthermore, what manner of man was Dean Malm, their leader and spiritual adviser?

The huge white manse loomed bright but solitary in its squalid surroundings. A stranger could not but stop and wonder why a parish which so sadly neglected its sanctuary and which allowed the schoolhouse to go to ruin, should have erected so stately a home for its pastor. The explanation must be found in the man who dwelt in those spacious rooms.

From the village street the great manse looked deserted and forbidding, the doors all closed, the shades drawn, and no sound of human voice to be heard.

But anyone who had the courage to approach the forbidding facade, step inside the gate, and follow the gravelled walk across the lawn, pass the clear, well-kept macadamized space in front of the house, and mount the high steps to the front door would be met there and shown through the vestibule into a cozy anteroom by a prim little woman who in a subdued voice announced that the parson would be found in the adjoining study. Meanwhile her eyes would scrutinize the visitor from head to foot, and woe unto him who in wet weather had failed to wipe his footwear clean on the door mat or who attempted to walk in to the parson without removing his overcoat.

The parishioners were all well aware of the little housekeeper's unrelenting watchfulness, and they tried as best they could to meet her minutest requirements. No one made any attempt to see the parson without first having donned his Sunday best, and the visitors tried with varying success to put on an urbane air and walk with the same genteel noiselessness as the hostess when approaching the parson's door. They all knew of these meticulous requirements and hampering formalities, — all but the parson himself. Had he known, he would doubtless have put an end to Miss Rosa's finical code of manners, for her system was admirably designed to widen the chasm which had opened between the shepherd and his flock in the course of years. As it was, no one sought the parson, save in extreme need.

Dean Malm and his daughter Harriet devoted them-

selves almost entirely to their books. When at the death of his wife the parson closed the door between himself and the outer world, and steeped himself in study, then the great chasm began to form between pastor and people. Those who at first had looked up to the stricken man with reverential sympathy became estranged by his aloofness and soon grew cold and indifferent. But his studies had been unable to satisfy his inner wants. In the course of years the children, Axel and Harriet, had grown up. He had personally attended to their early education by giving them their primary schooling in the home. In his daughter alone he discovered his own youthful enthusiasm for the great poets, his interest in history, and his thirst for general knowledge.

So the parson and his daughter spent their days and evenings almost exclusively in the library, year after year, oblivious of their surroundings and forgetful of life's duties. Miss Rosa alone had an eye to the inconsistency of this mode of life for a man placed in spiritual charge of a congregation. True, she was disposed to concede to her brother-in-law an intellectual plane higher than her own, but as for Harriet, that was another matter.

Rosa was an elder sister of the deceased, and her position as her successor in the management of the big house and guide and instructor of the two motherless children she had taken very seriously.

Her duties as housekeeper she performed most efficiently, but her method of training children proved a lamenta-

ble failure. Its first principle seemed to be that they must always be quiet. A solemn silence must reign in the home, particularly in the staid and dignified home of a minister of the gospel, that was one of her rules of propriety. On this point Harriet early yielded to her, but Axel was not to be so easily subdued. His was a rollicking boyish desposition; he *would* talk in a loud voice, despite all Rosa's reprimands, and against his racing through the house and his boisterous play her repressive measures had been of little avail. He had been the one disturbing element in the house for years, and when he was sent away to school in the city, it gave the smug little lady of the house a most welcome relief.

When Harriet grew older, however, Miss Rosa was far from pleased with her. She had grown old in kitchen and pantry, and from her domestic point of view the first and most essential of all womanly accomplishments was the art of cooking. Doubtful from the outset as to Harriet's studies, she grew more irritable as the study hours of the little girl grew more numerous, and when the daughter ultimately spent nearly all her time among her father's books the opinionated Miss Rosa washed her hands. Her brother-in-law would have to bear the entire responsibility for such a mode of education for a young lady.

Dean Malm fretted under the housekeeper's criticism of his methods, yet he could find nothing amiss in his daughter's predilection for study. To him her time was far better spent with the master works of great authors

than with all the pots and pans of a hundred kitchens; but when one day he carelessly dropped a hint to this effect, Miss Rosa had her answer ready.

"That's all very well for a boy, but in case of a girl it is altogether different."

The Dean found no reply. It had not occurred to him that studies ought to be proscribed in a girl's case. His daughter was fond of books; that had settled the matter.

"She will never marry, that's certain," pursued Miss Rosa in a wrought up tone, "for what chance of marriage has a girl who can't cook?"

There was a sharp glint in the parson's eye, and he was about to parry with a sarcasm the indignity to his daughter, but he thought better of it.

"We shall see," he said merely. Then he added, "However, Harriet may help you when needed."

Miss Rosa shrugged her spare shoulders in disdain. "Harriet, then, is to spend part of her time in the study and part in the kitchen. Learned as you are, you don't know your own child. That girl will never divide her interests."

She seemed to grow taller as she pronounced these words, each with a stress and a pause. When she saw how they went home to her brother-in-law, she felt still more exalted, and fearful lest the parson should get the better of her when he spoke, she swept grandly out of the room, feeling that this was one of the supreme moments in her life.

"She will never divide her interest." That was true. So also it was only too true that he did not know his own child. He pondered for a while on his daughter's probable lot in life, then gave up the problem. For why trouble one's mind about insoluble problems?

The words about Harriet's singleness of purpose rang in his ears for some time. Were they a prophecy of what was to be? He looked closely into her eyes every day as if to ascertain that no new emotion or purpose had entered her heart, and he found no hint or trace. For Rosa was right on one point: he did not know his own child.





V.

Harriet

As the years passed, Harriet Malm was all the more pained at the conviction that her father had not found his proper field of activity. It was a torture to her to sit in the empty church Sunday after Sunday, listening to his masterful sermons and feeling that they were wasted on these ignorant folk, while they would have been highly appreciated by more intelligent church audiences. Sometimes she wished him more stern and less genteel, more outspoken and less tolerant, for there was need of plain and forceful speech here in order that the truth should be heard and heeded.

Although she loved her native scenes with all her heart, the very air oppressed her when in her lonely walks and excursions in the neighborhood she saw the tumble-down dwellings, the neglected fences, the exhausted fields. There was lack of life and energy in these parts; enterprise was dead and all innovations were met with stubborn opposition.

She would always return home with a set determination to leave the narrow confines of home for that great wide, interesting world which her brother so enthusiastically described. The time had come for her to do something decisive. Marriage she had not thought of; she ignored all plans in that direction with manifest indifference. The scholarly young lady had formed her own opinion in all matters, that is, all save matrimony, which had not yet entered her mind.

One day as she sat in her favorite spot at the top of the high hill that commanded a view of all the surrounding country, sentiment got the better of her, and she penned these lines, the only stanza she ever indited:

Up and away on the tempest's wings,
 Far as the north winds go;
 Out and away from the little things;
 Through my life let the fresh breeze blow!
 Ah, how my bosom is burning
 With a fire quenchless, undying!
 My heart is forever yearning,
 Willing ears turning
 To the voice of life that is crying:
 Come, come away — — — — —

The thought was incomplete, and she cudgeled her brains for a logical finish, but it would not come. At a later day, when she did know what the conclusion was, the new, great experiences of life proved too beautiful, too deep for utterance, so she never completed the lines.



"Mother," said he gently, "do you remember the time when I was just a little boy?" Page 129.

One bitter morning in February Dean Malm's elegant sleigh and span of fine black roadsters pulled up to the front portico. The fiery, well-groomed animals snorted, champed their bits, stamped and pawed the glistening snow, and the breath issued from their distended nostrils in dense clouds. The old coachman had all he could do to hold them back while he was unclasping the apron and arranging the laprobes.

Harriet was making ready for a drive to the city in the intense cold, despite Miss Rosa's vigorous protests. What mattered the cold, — her young blood was warm? Looking out of the window where the light of the low winter sun fell into the room, her nerves fairly tingled in anticipation of the pleasure of a swift drive across the snowy expanse.

The dean had put on his big, shaggy fur coat to escort her to the sleigh, and just as she was about to step into it, Harriet with a quick impulse turned and gave her father an impetuous embrace. Without knowing why this sudden show of affection, she was slightly abashed before her father's fond look as well as the curious glance of old Mats the coachman as she hopped lightly into the back seat, and off they dashed.

All that day Harriet was constantly in her father's thoughts. He had come to a full realization of what she meant to him. True, she was not all that her mother had been, the light and life and power and joy of his life. But she was the boon companion, the bosom friend, the intel-

ligent comrade who could share his excursions into the realms of poesy. He felt now that she was more to him than ever before. Was it because she had grown mature and begun to live more intensively, while he himself was on the decline?

A thousand thoughts of his domestic life filed through his brains in unbroken succession during the dragging hours of that long day, as he paced the floor of his study with clockwork regularity.

Time and again he sought to shake off his moodiness by picturing to himself the figure of the girl as she mingled with the throngs in the city that day. Not without pride did he recall how fine and fresh and charming she looked that morning in her blue fox coat and bright scarf, her face glowing and her eyes sparkling under the rim of a jaunty fur hood. He felt sure that in the whole city there was no one like her. For she was the true daughter of a mother who had been the belle of her home town, her beauty undisputed and supreme.

He walked over to where his wife's portrait hung on the wall, the radiant eyes of the picture beaming lifelike upon him.

"Why, dear heart, did you leave me?" The words he spoke seemed to issue from a deep cavern. What a contrast! She, dead, yet so beaming and lifelike; he, alive, yet how dead! As he stood gazing at the picture, the days they had shared with one another seemed to him the only part of his life worthy of the name. The years that fol-

lowed had been nothing but an aching void to his heart, a bad dream of a stupendous task never accomplished.

Again there came to his memory those mysterious words of hers, which he could never understand, "I see the spring-time coming, — spring and sunshine for you and all those in your charge here. Spring is coming, sure, though tardy."

He walked over to his writing desk and dropped into his armchair with his face hidden in his hands. His keenest sorrow now was not the loss of his wife — time had mollified that —, but the fact that spring had not come — the spiritual springtime predicted by his sainted wife. Nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart there had always been, and there was still, a faint hope that whispered, "Spring will surely come."

Harriet returned late at night, and when the dean appeared at breakfast next morning he did not expect her to join him. He found her, however, already giving an account of her purchases to Miss Rosa.

"Up so early, my dear," he greeted her, "and how did you stand the trip?"

"Let your eyes be the judges, papa," she replied smiling. "I need an outing like that now and then to set my blood in circulation and to blow the dust and cobwebs from my brains."

"Oh, well," interposed Miss Rosa, "your blood is rushing fast enough, to my way of thinking, and your brains

are working full time. One could only wish your hands were half as busy."

Being in the best of humor, the girl took her aunt's criticism good-naturedly.

"Auntie," she replied, "what can I do to please you? Yesterday I gave my brains a rest while I had my hands full of shopping, still you did all in your power to keep me from it."

"Because I did not think it sensible for a young lady to start out for town at the risk of freezing to death," Miss Rosa retorted. "In my younger days everybody stayed indoors when the weather was twenty below."

She gave the dean a look as if in appeal to his corroboration, but found no support.

"We must remember that my daughter has inherited a robust constitution from my side of the family," he explained. "Up north we never paid much attention to the thermometer, and least of all in winter. If so, we would have had to huddle around the fireplace most of the time. That might do for genteel folks, but not for people of good old hardened peasant stock."

Miss Rosa was silenced. She could not bear to hear her brother-in-law thus openly make invidious comparisons between her family and his own. She sat stiff and formal in her black satin dress, feeling profoundly grateful that her father had held the office of district judge and that it had been her favored lot to live most of her time in the city, among people of good breeding.



VI.

“What Think You of Christ?”

Harriet broke the silence.

“Papa, I have so many things to talk over with you,” she said, as the two withdrew to the study and took their customary places.

“Did you miss me yesterday?” she inquired archly.

“Well, yes, maybe the least bit,” the dean returned, affecting indifference.

She gave him a searching look, as if to sound the depth of his meaning.

“I missed you *very much*,” she said slowly and with feeling, then continued more lightly, “Oh, papa, one must get away from home at times in order to appreciate to the full all that it implies. For some time I have been longing for something, I know not what. I thought it was the outer world so enchantingly described by my brother Axel, — the excitement of city life. But yesterday taught me that I could not endure to live in town. It is so noisy,

so crowded, so stuffy and confining. Now this great silence rings like beautiful music in my ears. I hear voices issue from my own heart, and these dear old rooms are resonant with harmony and song."

"And yet the piano has been locked these twenty years," said her father by way of concealing his own emotion.

She paid no attention to his remark.

"But it was you that I missed most of all, father," she proceeded solemnly. Maybe the city would seem a better place if you had been there. The people I met were so different from — from you. In driving home late last night in the starlight I had plenty of time for reflection. Then it struck me that all the townspeople whom I had met were but so many actors in a big play with the whole city for a stage. Has it ever appeared that way to you?"

The parson withheld his answer while harking back to yesterday's retrospect.

"Yes, my child, at times," he said sadly.

"I thought so," she nodded understandingly. "Of course the idea is not new or original at all. On the way home last night I thought of the great Caesar Augustus of Rome who after a long life, which had yielded all that he could desire, on his deathbed said to those around him, 'Applaud, my friends; the play is ended.' Before my mind's eye there passed the whole drama of life prior to the time of the great Augustus; I thought of all the ancient races which had had 'their exits and their entrances,' coming on the stage to play their part and then stepping off

the boards of the world scene. They each in turn came out of the unknown, became great and powerful, and held the center of the stage for a short time, only to disappear when their given role had been enacted. Perhaps Augustus was thinking of all these theatrical entrances and exits. Perhaps he saw how his own mighty nation was already nearing the close of its part in the world drama and nearing its decline and fall. Shakespeare's famous lines — 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players' — ran through my mind as I thought of this wide and universal theater of life and, looking up to the stars, I wondered how these human tragedies of ours look from their high plane. But the stars had no answer. They looked mutely down on the little human mite that had almost presumed to ask them.

"While I was steeped in contemplation the scene shifted from the death of Augustus to that of another Man who lived about the same time. I heard the agonized cry in His dying moment — 'It is finished.' Father, we two have talked of many things, but never of this. Tell me now, what is your opinion of the Master of Nazareth?"

The dean was shocked at his daughter's unexpected question. All that she had said before was familiar to him but this one question brought up a matter that the old parson was quite unprepared to discuss.

"You certainly know my position," he said evasively.

Although perceiving that he was loath to touch upon this subject she pressed her point, anxious to know what

her father really thought of that Man of men who had been in her mind almost all the way home.

"*What* was 'finished'?" she inquired in order to draw him out.

"There are various interpretations of that, my dear; I think it merely referred to His suffering. Besides, we have no certain evidence that those were His words. As for me, I hold that we must look upon Jesus of Nazareth broadly as a character of absolute purity, a wise teacher, the friend of mankind, and so forth."

"You hold, then, that He was a mere man?"

"He was the Ideal Man."

"But not the Son of God?"

Dean Malm shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Paul tells us that 'in Him we live, and move, and have our being,' and then quotes the Greek poets to the effect that 'we are also His offspring.' In that sense He was the Son of God, and I will add that no man was ever in a deeper sense the Son of God."

"But how do you explain the great difference between Him and His fellow men?" Harriet pursued.

"That is explained by what I have just said. He was a son of God in the complete sense. All men then as now sought their own selfish ends; all circled about self as the center of interest. He followed a different path. He was literally *eccentric* to the last degree, and that is why some said of Him that He was demented."

But Harriet was not satisfied with her father's philosophical explanation.

"On what ground, then, did He attain such overwhelming influence over other men?"

"He appeared at a very critical time. Your quotation from Augustus proves it. The ruler of well-nigh all the world, the lord of millions of men, who saw his empire flourish in every way and under whose protection commerce and industry, art and science thrived, — not even he was able to stay the internal decadence; and during his reign the invincible Roman armies were defeated by a more powerful race. If we view conditions in the Holy Land at this period we will...."





VII.

Moor Farm Misery

Dean Malm was interrupted by Miss Rosa's usual discreet knock at the study door. It opened, and a short, square-built young man stepped in. Without saying a word, he put his hand to his cap as if to doff it, but only to pull it farther down over his forehead.

"How are you, my friend?" the parson greeted him by way of drawing the silent visitor out. "You have come a long way this morning?"

The man at the door had no words. He apparently had to thaw out in the warmth of the room before he was able to tell his errand.

"Won't you please be seated?" pursued the parson in a friendly tone.

But the young man held his place just inside the door, standing mute and motionless for fully a minute. Ultimately he got ready to speak.

"Pa is dead." He delivered his sad message in something like a growl.

There might have been a good deal to say on this occasion. The parson well knew what wretchedness prevailed in the distant corner of the parish whence this young man came. The place where he lived was surrounded by marshes and could scarcely be reached in summer time except on foot. The parson had made a visit there but once, and that was in winter, when he drove mile upon mile across frozen bogs and marshlands. The young man was of a piece with the environment where he had grown up. The trees and shrubs that lined the moors and morasses were dwarfed and thickset like himself, and like him the entire country round about was gloomy, dismal, and forbidding.

Dean Malm made no remarks. He noted down the usual data in the parish record, then turned to inquire:

"When will the funeral take place?"

His tone was abrupt and matter-of-fact, for every reminder of the misery prevailing in the parish seemed to touch a sore spot within him. The mental pain did not serve to soften his voice.

"Well, ma is sick, so we thought...."

The young man did not finish. Thinking his meaning fairly plain, he did not care to waste words.

But the parson failed to understand.

"Well, young man, speak out. What did you think?"

He made his voice a shade milder as he pictured to himself the utter hopelessness of the situation out there on the desolate moor farm. The father dead, the mother ill, the

sons out in the lumber camps all day long, and a young girl alone with the dead and the dying at home. He had noticed in the record that there was a young daughter in the family, and it was mainly pity for her that softened his tone as he spoke.

"We thought we'd better wait, and then bury them both at the same time," the messenger from the stricken home finally explained.

The speaker seemed surprised at this unaccustomed flow of words from his own lips and as if frightened by their grim candor he quickly touched his cap again, opened the door and, closing it behind him with a bang, strode noisily through the big vestibule and disappeared.

For a moment father and daughter looked at one another in amazement at the shocking heartlessness and inhumanity betrayed by the young man's admission.

"Run, Harriet, — call him back; I'll...."

The dean's face flushed with righteous wrath as he spoke. He instantly resolved to give the impious young peasant a sharp lecture on his duties to God, to his pastor, and to his old parents.

His anger, however, quickly subsided, and when the girl returned with the explanation that the visitor went his way paying no attention to her calls, the parson realized that words of reprimand would have been wasted on this fellow.

As soon as practicable, Dean Malm drove out to the moor farm, accompanied by one of the deacons of the

church. What he there saw and heard he never told Harriet in detail. All that she learnt was that the old man was buried the following Sunday, there being but one mourner present, his daughter, a young girl, Harriet's junior by several years.

Along in the spring the mother also passed away. When he learnt of this, the parson decided off hand to take the young girl to the parsonage to stay. Harriet said nothing about the arrangement. Having witnessed the depravity of the brother, she had taken an interest in the girl, whose tender childish face bespoke a kindlier nature.

But Miss Rosa flew into a towering rage when informed of the dean's decision, made without her advice. Her opposition notwithstanding, May Woods, the orphaned farmer girl, moved into the parsonage.

There she was at once placed under Harriet's tutorship, and the parsonage became the scene of more intensive application to study than ever before. Another deliver into learned lore was added, and besides, the parson and his daughter had put renewed vigor into their searching of the Scriptures after their conversation about Him of whom these bear witness.





VIII.

A Vacation Visitor

One day Axel came home on a visit, bringing with him his friend and college chum, Henry Falconer, a civil engineer. This young man was not entirely a stranger in the parsonage, Axel having often spoken of him in his letters.

"We two are like soul and body," Axel jocularly explained to his father upon introducing his friend, adding, "— and Henry is the body." This was his mode of conveying an idea of the close comradeship between them.

"You two should be on your guard," he continued broadly as Harriet and Henry shook hands. "You may have found your match," he added ambiguously.

Harriet looked the young man over with curious scrutiny. She rather liked his easy bearing, and her heart was not entirely neutral the moment she extended her hand in welcome. The young engineer pressed it with rather too firm a grip, the hard, rough palm betraying readiness and capacity for even physical labor.

Harriet smiled secretly at her brother's remark, the

point of which she instantly perceived, for this young man was so far removed from her ideal of a life companion as to seem almost the reverse of it.

Short of stature as he was, young Falconer cut a very slight figure beside the tall and portly parson; nor did he measure up to the more than average proportions of the son. But there was compensation for lack of stature in a physique that bespoke energy and will power; and the young man's face was lit up by a genial pair of eyes that seemed to penetrate deep and far.

The two young men brought with them a whiff of air from the great world beyond the confines of the parish in the wilderness. Axel had many incidents to relate, and in all his little adventures his friend Henry played a part.

"I trust your friend will not find his stay in our quiet corner too tedious after all that," said the parson with a look at the young engineer, when Axel had finished a series of personal narratives.

"By no means, father. He is as fond of the country as I am of the city," Axel assured his father, with an appealing glance at his companion.

"Yes, I freely admit that I am," said Henry Falconer. "The country is my choice, and there I expect to locate some day."

The dean eyed him for an instant.

"Think twice before you do, my young friend. It might turn out to be the funeral of your ambition in life," he warned.

There was something in the parson's voice that made both Axel and Harriet very much depressed. But the stranger buoyed them up with his more cheerful point of view.

"Oh, no, my dear parson, I cannot believe that. It is very much easier to bury oneself in a big city, that is to say, if one lacks ability and falls short in the sharp competition there. Then one has to be content with being a mere molecule in the great mass, or at best a cog in the machinery of commerce. But to make the most of things, to live the life, not merely act a part, one has to go to the country."

Axel laughed noisily. His aunt's suppressive measures were long since forgotten, and he was not accustomed to put his risible powers under restraint.

"Henry is like the immortal Caesar," he broke forth. "He'd rather be first in a village than second in Rome. He doubts his ability to become a head higher than all the people in Stockholm, so he prefers to rule the roost in some country district."

The young engineer sought in vain to register a protest.

"Never mind, old boy," young Malm interposed, "I have spoken, and you know it is so. Now, give us a tune."

The fact was that the parson had at length brought himself to unlock the old piano. He felt unwarranted in longer keeping from the young people the enjoyment of music tabooed in the house for so many years.

Henry Falconer went over to the instrument and seated

himself on the swivel stool. For some moments he sat pondering, as if in mental search of a suitable selection. A thundering chord and a deft run was suddenly heard. It was a man's playing, — a man of forceful fancy and clear vision, who not only was conscious of a creative genius within but who felt the power to interpret his conception upon the keyboard.

What he played Harriet did not know. That he was somewhat of an artist she at once realized, and the presence of just such a personality as his began to impart a peculiar satisfaction to her. A strain of her own longing for other scenes, new experiences, greater tasks in life, she seemed to recognize in his skillful improvizations. Just as this young man at that moment did not know whether he would like to be Caesar, whether in Rome or the provinces, so Harriet knew not what her station was to be, — only this she knew, that fill a place she must, whether high or low, for she was young, she was strong.





IX.

On the Joy of Being Alive

The days that now followed were rich in pleasure and sunshine. Axel was an adept at entertaining and in providing social pastimes. The dean meanwhile withdrew to his study, for the mirth and merrymaking of the young people did not now quite tally with his temperament.

He would probably have borne it better, but for the fact that Axel in the last few years had grown to a striking resemblance of his mother. That gave to the father's mind a retrospective trend, and he lived mostly among his memories. Axel was blond and smiling, like his mother; Harriet darker and of a more sober temperament. His eyes beamed ever so much more brightly than those in the picture on the study wall; his open-heartedness, like his mother's, was the key that opened to him the hearts of others.

The three young people fared far and wide through the surrounding country, — they must see all there was to see of picturesque beauty and grandeur of natural scenery.

Axel spoke to every one they met, never so happy as when he succeeded in engaging some one of these quiet, plodding, buttoned up parishioners in conversation. This brought Harriet surprise upon surprise, firmly convinced as she was that these people had neither words nor thoughts over and above the daily modicum.

"Well, if that isn't the son of the parson's wife," ejaculated one old man at the poorhouse, rudely ignoring the paternal origin of his young friend. "I knew *her* all right, God rest her soul."

"Your memory is good, my dear old friend," said Axel. "And this is my sister Harriet and my friend Henry Falconer."

The old man looked keenly at them both.

"This young man I never met, but I see he's making the parson's daughter company," he sized up the situation.

Axel smiled at the old man's way of drawing distinctions by calling him "the son of the parson's wife," while Harriet was referred to as "the parson's daughter." Seeing merely the humorous side, Axel was thoughtless enough to repeat the old man's words at the dinner table.

Much was never said at the parson's table, but this time Dean Malm sat perfectly silent, and, dinner being over, he went back to his study without a word. Yet no one paid any attention to his reticence, silence being the rule of the house.

The young people adjourned to the garden, seating themselves on the sunlit lawn. Soon Axel threw himself

on his back, his eyes exploring the blue sky, the other two meanwhile talking together in a low voice.

"If there must be talking, I beg to request that you talk aloud," Axel demanded serio-comically. "I am holding converse with the gods above and you mortals disturb me with your prattle."

He sat up and eyed the two with a speaking look. Henry Falconer looked sheepish, but Harriet braved his scrutiny.

"Here I lie, listening to the numberless voices of silence," Axel Malm continued — with a grand gesture —, "I hear the grass grow; I hear the very pulse of nature throb. I am listening to what the flowers are saying, and yet you dare to interrupt!"

"By all means, lie down and listen," urged Henry. "We promise not to utter a sound, provided you tell us what the flowers are saying."

"Well, I'll please you to the extent of putting my ear to the bosom of Mother Earth, but no more. To interpret to you the language of the flowers, — well, it simply can't be done. I might as well try to describe music in words. It takes a fine ear to appreciate music, but a much finer to catch the sublime and mystic articulations of nature. As I lie here on my back in the grass, every nerve tingling in the light of the sun, I distinctly hear the voice of Mother Nature, and, more than that, the voices of her myriad children."

After a moment of silence he started humming an old

college tune. Soon the words suggested themselves, and before he was aware of it, he was singing out with full voice:

“Oh, how fit for gods this place is,
 Oh, how good to live to-day!
 See how fresh and green the grasses,
 Hear the birds sing forth their lay!
 Bumblebees and bugs accost us;
 Heav’n with song of larks is filled;
 Aye, the flowers themselves would toast us,
 Each in cup with nectar filled.”

His song rang out loud and clear, its tones penetrating even the silence that was wont to surround the person of Miss Rosa. The uncalled for vociferation ought by right to have annoyed her; nevertheless she was unable to suppress a smile. The fact was, young Axel had taken her by storm. The same sounds reached the ears of Dean Malm seated at his study table, causing the old man at first to prick up his ears and then bow his head attentively at this pean to the joy of living.

“What makes you always so cheerful, Axel?” queried his sister with a hint of bitterness or regret in her tone.

“Cheerful? — How can you use such a trite word? On a day like this, with sunshine and blue sky, flowers covering the moors and meadows, with turtledoves cooing to one another and the cuckoo singing for his own enjoyment — with sly reference to his two companions and himself —, then ‘cheerful’ is no word at all. I am simply

intoxicated with the elixir of life; I am drowning in the flood of joy that fills me within and surrounds me without. Harriet, don't you ever feel the transcendent joy of living, the bliss of being alive in a world of beauty? Are you never carried away as on waves of beatitude? To me the greatness of existence, of being a human individual, at times swallows up all other considerations."

"We are made of coarser clay than you, I suppose," Henry Falconer rejoined, presuming to speak for Harriet as well as for himself. "You are the idealist, with clear vision of that beauty which we cannot see, because we have dust in our eyes, or because we have strained our vision looking for the things we want, while forgetting the things we have. We sense the beautiful of the world around us in a way, we materialists, but we are too much occupied with our own unfulfilled desires to be able to derive the pleasure from the present moment that you do. You say life plays charming melodies all about us, and within us. I, for one, can't hear the music, — there must be something lacking. . . ."

He finished abruptly, with a slight blush. In his effort to make clear his own position and to rally to the defense of Harriet's point of view, he had almost said too much. Fortunately, no one took note of his discomfiture.

During a moment of silence following the argument, a young girl passed through the front gate and was tripping gracefully up the walk when Axel Malm was struck by a whim.

"Oh, May!" he called to her, "come here a moment, please."

The girl turned on the lowest step of the portico and approached the group smiling.

"Pray, tell us, May, isn't it a glorious thing to be alive?" he asked.

Not knowing what to make of the question, the young girl stood before them with downcast eyes, unwilling to hazard a reply. Still unaccustomed to kindness, a thing unknown on the moor farm whence she had come, she thought it no little thing to be questioned in such a matter by the son of the house. His meaning she was unable to conjecture, but his clear blue eyes looked into hers in a way to set her heart beating faster.

"Why, yes, — of course," she said at length, encouraged by his frank, cordial look.

"Good! I win. You're in the wrong, you two," he shouted, turning to Harriet and Henry. "May says so, and she's an impartial judge."

The young girl from the wilderness flushed vividly, not knowing what was at stake, nor what bearing her verdict might have, yet she withdrew with a light heart, conscious of being on Axel's side and of having aided him in gaining a point.





X.

Letters That Kill

The old-time silence was restored in the parsonage when the two young men left to resume their studies at the university. But it was not the same dead monotony as before. They had left behind a subtle influence, and stirred up a host of new ideas in Harriet's mind. She had been given to understand that she possessed prerequisites for making her life count. Youth, health, knowledge and mental power were hers; all that she needed was opportunity. She no longer feared city life. In so far as she would be able to invest her powers, such a life would cease to be mere play-acting, as she had imagined it.

Again father and daughter sat together in the study. The dean was in hopes that their mutual studies would be resumed, the old order restored, but the old books no longer fully satisfied the young woman. For a time book lore may satisfy youthful thirst for knowledge, but when life itself begins to reveal to them its depth and beauty, the printed volumes become dead letters, and life is trans-

muted from the potentialities of thought and theory into action and its results.

Dean Malm saw full well that Harriet had received a number of new impressions. These he hoped would prove volatile and unenduring, but they had set a new, inerascable stamp on her life. She kept drifting away from him, and the chasm widened between them. Life's voices, which no longer beckoned to the aging parson, now rang clear in his daughter's ears. She realized that he lapsed deeper and deeper into stagnation and darkness.

More than ever her eyes were open to the harm done to the parish by her father's putting his light under the bushel. In pursuing ideal things he had deserted the real things. Like a farmer neglecting or abandoning his fields, so the parson had failed to till the spiritual field entrusted to his care. His studies had absorbed all the interest and energy demanded by the people whose spiritual adviser and guide he was to have been.

At one time Harriet had gloried in the lofty pedestal upon which her father's learning had placed him. Now she saw with grief that it had set him beyond the reach of the people and brought him out of all contact with them. She felt, too, some degree of responsibility for conditions as they were, having had a part in drawing her father's interest away from his first duty, while the field to which he owed his labors was running to weeds.

Now she wanted to leave the place. It was too narrow for her, and she could no longer bear to witness the grad-

ual decay. Not that she loathed the environment in itself; on the contrary, she loved her native place intensely, cherishing for it an attachment shared by no other spot on earth. She would be homeless anywhere else. And her father, an old man with silvery hair, — was he to sit here like a hermit, delving in his books? Could she leave him thus? Her heart said no, but life beckoned her away.

One day Harriet came into the study while her father was busily engaged in preparing next Sunday's sermon. Without knocking, she hurried softly over to his desk. Laying his pen aside, he looked up into her face and perceived instantly that what she had to tell him was not pleasant.

"What are you doing, father?" she began.

"I am writing my sermon, as you see?" he replied.

"Don't you ever tire of preaching, father, having kept it up these thirty years?" Harriet pursued.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Yes, for thirty years," she said. "At first you spoke to great crowds. Last Sunday there were seven in church. How do you feel about this?"

What did she mean? She, always considerate before, now turned so brutal! There was a strange fire in her eye as she spoke.

With a shrug of his shoulders, the parson reached for the pen to resume writing.

Harriet burst into tears. To see his proud daughter

weeping was too much for him. It touched him to the quick.

"Dear child, what is the matter?" he blurted, wiping his glasses vehemently.

Harriet kept crying, not nervously and turbulently, as weak women do, but with a quiet dignity, as one who is strong to bear sorrow. Silence reigned in the study and from the shelves all around the room the old tomes stood in rows and looked grimly down at their weeping friend.

Harriet suddenly drew the handkerchief from her eyes and made a threatening gesture toward the books.

"Father," she said appealingly, "burn all those old books! Burn them, every one, and start life anew."

He was shocked. Had his daughter lost her senses? No, her face was bright with intelligence, and she spoke with the inexorable power that characterized the prophets of old.

"Burn them, father!" — she repeated. "They have led you from the path of duty. They have blinded you to the reality. You don't know how things are going in the parish. There's drinking and stealing everywhere. Your parishioners are leading the roughest kind of life, putting them in bad repute and causing all decent people to remove from the neighborhood."

Having spoken rapidly and with unwonted energy, she stopped to gain her breath.

"But, my dear child," he interposed, "is that my fault?"

He spoke calmly but in a tone of dismay.

"No, father, not you, but your books are at fault. They have taken all your time — your best years. But it is not too late to change. Give up your books, or burn them if need be — and turn back to real life. When you have seen all the wretchedness, the superstition, the baseness and brutality hereabouts, — then preach. Preach to these people with the thunder voice of Sinai, for they have forgotten the Lord God and all his commandments. Speak so these dead bones awake and live!"

She was beautiful as she spoke. Her face seemed transfigured with the faith, fire, and conviction of youth.

The old parson turned his gray head slowly away, his eyes dazzled by the ardor that shone from his daughter's eyes. In that moment he recalled a young preacher who once had spoken as Harriet spoke, possessed of the faith that was in her, inspired by her fire and zeal. With his compelling eloquence he would kindle a fire that was to consume all that was doomed to destruction; awake the slumberers with the thunders of Sinai; strike down evil with the lightning bolts of truth. And at first he had seemed to have all the prerequisites for success, for the great church had been crowded to overflowing. He had rejoiced, and Magnild, his young wife, had shared his hopes and spurred his ambition.

How he had loved these plain, rude, ignorant folk! They had been like fatherless children, like sheep without a shepherd, until he had come to help and lead them,

— he and the gentle shepherdess who slept these twenty years.

“Burn these books,” Harriet had advised. The child! What did she know? To him, after the shipwreck of life’s joy and hope, they had been the plank that kept him from going down. Without them he would have been lost, and for his children’s sake he must not go down.

His sorrows were his own, and he alone must bear them.

All these bitter reflections suggested themselves at the advice given by his daughter. When she had regained her composure he had his reply ready. It was this:

“I burn nothing. Every book is dear to me.”

Before Harriet’s eyes the glittering temple of hope fell like a house of cards. Her attempt to bridge the ever widening chasm between them had utterly failed. From this moment on they were doomed to isolation.

“Father, let me look you in the eyes,” demanded Harriet.

“No, never mind,” said the parson curtly. The kindly light in his eyes was extinguished; there was nothing but dead, gray ashes left.

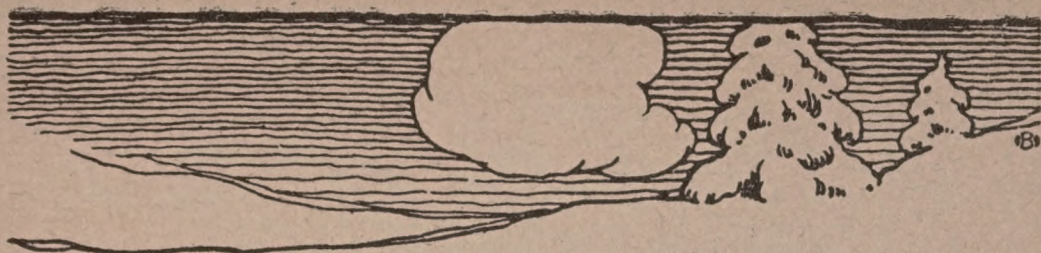
She looked at her father fondly, though he turned his back to her, and felt an impulse to stroke his gray head, but his brash “no” barred her.

“Good-bye, then, father,” and she left the room with sad but determined steps. When she had gone, the parson

stared long at her accustomed place in the study. It was vacant now — for good and all.

He rose, went to the door of the study, and turned the lock.





XI.

A Maiden Wooed and Won

Harriet was now fully aware that from her father there was nothing to hope for. His last word had sounded the death knell to her hopes for his rejuvenation. But she had youth and strength. Had she suffered defeat, well and good — she would be so much the better prepared for the next battle.

Her power and self-confidence grew as she strolled out of the hamlet one day, thinking over her future course. When she reached the high point from which she was wont to view the surrounding country, she fell to examining her own feelings, instead of viewing nature's panorama.

She felt a new inspiration, — whence had it come? What was it that had given such courage and strength? Whence came the power that emboldened her to appear as critic and mentor of her own father?

Deep within her she heard strains of music, strong but sweet, and she saw the musician before her, the young

engineer-artist, Henry Falconer. It became clear to her now that it was that music that had awakened her soul. Ay, more than that, it was the melodious interpretation of his own feelings that first aroused her interest in the young stranger, and at this moment she secretly owned to a fervent affection for him.

She sank down in her favorite place on a rock and her cheeks flushed as the secret of her heart dawned upon her here in nature's solitude. She hid her face in her hands as if in fear that the very trees would read her secret in her blush — a secret too precious to be imparted by word or look. — —

In his study meanwhile sits the old parson, bending deeply over the desk before him. His sorrow is too profound for tears. He is brooding over the problem of his life, his own and Harriet's, and it is but a groping in the dark. Not one ray of light; no solution. Evasion is the only way open: he must read, study, forget. . .

He rises from his chair and takes from one of the shelves his favorite author. Presently he is so engrossed in the poet's lines that his eyes and ears are shut to the outside world.

Miss Rosa knocked gently at his door and turned the knob. It would not open. She announced a caller who had important business. There was no response from within.

"He is sleeping," she announced, as she returned to the visitor in the vestibule.

"Perhaps I may see Miss Harriet, then," ventured the caller, whom she recognized as the young engineer, yet treated as a total stranger.

"She went up to the hilltop, and I can't say when she will return," he was coldly informed. "I might send some one to look for her, if you insist," she added, with scant encouragement.

"Never mind, I'll look her up myself," — and before Miss Rosa had time to remonstrate, Henry Falconer was off for the hillcrest.

With Miss Rosa's temperament and her set notions about propriety, one would feel outraged at less. The very idea of the young man rushing off like that, scouring the woods for a young lady as if she were mere game! Besides, who knew anything about this young fellow. Surely Harriet knew him no better than did the rest, still she must have had a hand in this. Such manners as the young folks have nowadays! In Rosa's younger days a girl who tried to put over an affair like this with a total stranger would have been promptly curbed, — indeed!

Miss Rosa worked herself into a fine fit of anger at the ways of modern youth.

The parson had just entered his study after a walk in the garden. It was a day of interruptions and mental disturbance. He was about to finish the manuscript for his sermon when in came Harriet and Henry Falconer unannounced.

"Reverend sir," said the latter, stepping up bravely and

bowing humbly before the dean, "I have come to ask for your daughter's hand."

In his wrought up state of mind nothing could surprise or further perturb the old gentleman on that day. For one long minute he looked out of the window, over where she slept who once stood flushed and expectant by his side as his daughter now stood by the side of him to whom her heart had yielded. He fought hard to maintain the calm and dignity that befits a father in a like situation, and more particularly a man of his profession, meanwhile seeking to mask his nervousness by wiping his spectacles with extreme care.

Raising his eyes at length, he looked squarely into the earnest face of the young engineer; then turned them upon his daughter. Their happiness was revealed in the countenance of both, as also a set purpose that would brook no opposition. His knowledge of his own self told him that resistance would be useless and setting up conditions would avail nothing. This was a case where nothing remained for the parent but to join the hands of two young mortals whom love had already made one.

When supper was over, and the young pair had withdrawn to the garden, Miss Rosa made haste to interview her brother-in-law on what she termed "unseemly goings-on" in the house.

"Why have not I been told of this?" she demanded. "I, who have been as a mother to your child all these

years," she continued with all the dignity at her command.

The parson was slightly shocked. The strident notes of the day had just softened into sweet harmony, when Miss Rosa struck this discord, so jarring to the parson's sensibilities at this particular time.

"Harriet has had neither mother nor father," he said after a moment's thought. He was reconciled to what had happened, without let or hindrance on his part, and rejoiced inwardly at the manifest happiness of the young people.

Miss Rosa found no reply, tacitly admitting the truth of the parson's terse statement. So she took a new tack.

"Has the young man got anything?" she inquired with an impertinence little short of rudeness.

The parson did not grasp her meaning.

"Can he support a wife, I mean," she reiterated in plainer terms and with ill concealed distemper.

"I don't know, I am sure, Miss Rosa. I have not given that matter a thought," the parson replied suavely.

At this the little lady flew into a fury.

"Do you ever think about *anything*?" she upbraided him. "A fine father, indeed, to throw his daughter at the first stranger that applies, and she a refined young lady who might have married to great advantage!" The last words were spoken midway between a hiss and a whisper.

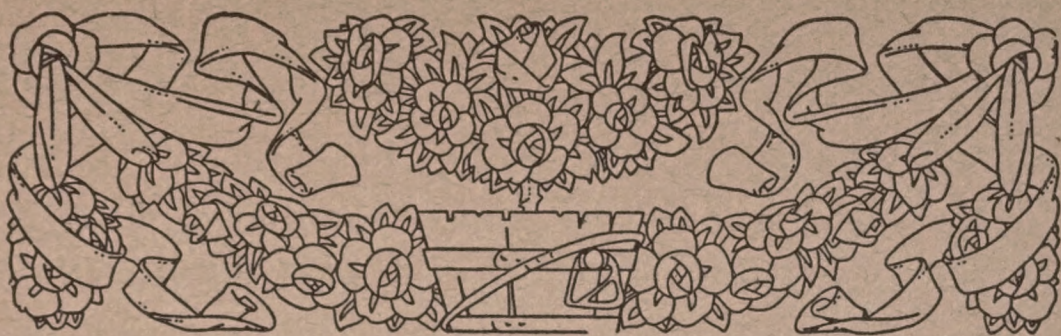
This time Dean Malm fully understood.

"What God hath joined together let no man put asun-

der," he quoted in a reverent voice, then added this ultimatum: "Now we will speak no more of this."

The irate little lady, taken very much aback by the sudden assertiveness of this big man whom she had managed completely for a score of years, retired in a great huff to her own apartment. Never again did she touch upon this matter in the parson's presence. As for the betrothed young couple, she came to hold their covenant in great respect as she learnt to know the young intruder better.





XII.

The Spirit That Giveth Life

Late that night, after the lights were out in the parsonage, the lamp was still burning in the parson's study. The silvery-haired divine was bending over his desk, still engaged in the task of finishing his sermon, a process so often interrupted.

His mind wanders from the text, and he sits there thinking of his own life. A barren thing it appears; a dark road lit up but sparingly and at long intervals. Only to-night he seems to be passing one of the lights along the way. The love irradiated by the young couple had warmed his own heart.

The door opens and Harriet steals to the old man's side.

"Father dear," she falters, and the two are joined in an embrace firm and long.

They sit silent for a long while, she upon his lap as in years gone by when he was teaching her the letters.

"Father, I had to see you once more — I had to come and ask your pardon" . . .

"No — no," he protested gently, "you were in the right, my child. Make no apology for speaking the truth."

"Yes, it was the truth — one side of it. I now see the other side. I asked you to put the thunders of Sinai into your sermons in order to wake the people up. Now I am convinced that you will accomplish more by preaching love than law, for love is the greatest power in the world, the greatest force in life, — life itself. We have sat here, you and I, trying to live by and through books. Then came real life knocking at my door. Henry came and with him love. Now that I know love, I believe in life, real, actual life, not a mere semblance of it. Life is action. We must

"Act, act in the living present,"
— not bury ourselves in the dead past. And now that my eyes have been opened, I have regained faith in these people — your people. Their salvation can and must be worked out."

A short silence followed. The old parson understood his daughter's meaning perfectly. His memory reverted to the time when Magnhild came into his life. It was a spark of the mother's zeal and enthusiasm that had now been rekindled in the daughter.

We began to recount the past, dwelling on the time when he and his young wife first came to the parish. He glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke of the revival and

moral betterment that marked the first year of his pastorate there. Then of the relapse and the decadence that followed upon Magnhild's death. He had sown the good seed, given the people the best there was in him to give, yet the field had borne nothing but thistles and thorns.

"Oh, my child," he exclaimed, heartsick and discouraged, "is it any wonder that in such circumstances a man gives up, abandons the field, and takes refuge in intellectual pursuits? For a pastor to work among perverse and degenerate people is little better than being a gravedigger. He has nothing to do with them until they are dead. — It was just as natural for me to take to my studies as for some men to resort to strong drink, or for others to yield to the all-consuming passion for making money. All of us are likely to yield entirely to some predilection when we are up against it, when we grow tired of fighting, and life seems a failure."

With these words Dean Malm lifted a corner of the drapery that concealed his true self.

"Father dear," — Harriet sought to put comfort into her tone, — "you must not imagine that all the good seed you have sown is lost. You remember the words of the poet, —

"Thoughts pure and just, acts born of love sublime,
And beauty wrought in dreams, endure for aye;
That harvest, rescued from the storms of time,
Shall fill God's granaries beyond the sky.
Mankind, be brave! Go forth at life's behest!
Thou bear'st eternity within thy breast."

Her every word struck home. Her youthful trust and zeal, her unswerving faith in the future, shattered his skepticism and gave him to see as with new eyes. The veil which had so long obscured his outlook upon life was now drawn aside. With eyes of hope he began to see the seed he had sown sprout and give promise of rich harvest.

The parson rewrote his sermon from first to last, and on the following Sunday he preached with a power and enthusiasm that astonished his hearers. He had chosen his text from the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians. It was a grand homily on the power of love, simple withal, which went to the heart of every one.

"For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known." These words the parson read as though for the first time. Might he not take this passage to himself as presaging a coming change from darkness to light in his own life, another and surer promise of a spiritual springtime and a new birth for his parish?

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal," — when he preached on these words, both his daughter and the parson himself imagined that her love had furnished the motive. It soon became clear to him, however, that the words put into his mouth were inspired by some other power. They kept resounding in his own

ears, preaching more powerfully to him than he to his hearers.

He began to feel more deeply the needs of his people. A profound compassion seized him. He must give them the water of life. While Magnhild was with him it had seemed easy to give comfort to others, easy to dispense spiritual succor and preach the gospel of love. But after her departure, his life had been a wandering in the desert, where there was not water enough to quench his own thirst, much less to give to the people. Now his own thirst had become insufferable. He must smite the rock of truth. After twenty years in the wilderness, he was filled with an insatiable longing for the Land of Promise.

The preacher and pastor of more than thirty years' experience in guiding, or rather attempting to guide others in the way of life, now himself became a true seeker after God. He sought at first as the strayed child, lost in the forest on a dark, misty day, anxiously searches for the homeward path. At length it begins to call, to cry out aloud, and listen for an answer from the supposed direction of the home. It calls and calls. Suddenly the bell of the village church begins to toll. The child follows the guiding tones and soon finds its way home in safety.

Dean Malm sought the strait and narrow way and found it. It lead him into a new world as full of life as the old was full of death, a world that gave riches for poverty, light for darkness. Of the new light in which

he walked he read with amazement and new understanding:

“The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but Jehovah will be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for Jehovah will be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

And in the sequel to these words of the prophet Isaiah he found a promise that held good during the remainder of his pastoral career:

“Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation: I, Jehovah will hasten it in its time.”

The farther he penetrated into this new world, the brighter the light, and its horizon was brightest of all. Death had no power here, for those who had entered it had passed from death unto life. It was the kingdom of God on earth, the eternal life begun here below, invisible and unknown to most mortals.

A funeral was held on the day that the parson preached his sermon on love, so a large crowd of people happened to be in attendance. The news of the “remarkable sermon” spread like wildfire, as indeed there was in it a fire that kindled and spread in the hearts of many in the

audience. The following Sunday many more came to hear, and the number increased from week to week. And as the old parson stood in his pulpit looking over his great audience, knowing how small a share he had in bringing them there, he was overwhelmed with the realization of the power and glory of the divine gospel, and he felt as never before that he was the mere spokesman for some other one, the messenger and servant of Almighty God. The words that were given him to speak he knew to be the words of God himself. He no longer had any doubt that he was scattering the seeds from which eternal life was to spring.

The wintry gloom began to give way, the cold to yield, the ice to break up, and the hearts in the parish to thaw out. True, there were further frosts and storms to come, but the new light was irresistible; it bore life-giving power and caused all that it touched to awake, and live, and grow.

The springtime predicted by Magnhild on her death-bed, — had it come at last?





XIII.

Sunnycrest

Many years passed, and great changes took place. One who had not seen the little hamlet around the church for fifteen years would not have recognized it now. Of the houses dating from that time there was none but the parsonage left standing. Formerly that had been the only two-story structure in the place; now there were rows of neat and commodious houses, most of them as large as that, and some larger. The narrow, crooked lanc that had been lined with little thatched huts had been transformed into a straight, well graded street with walks on either side, and rows of modern residences. One might wonder how all this had come about, and where all the people had come from; but a glance at the neighboring factories and the railway station surrounded by great piles of lumber furnished the explanation. Enterprise had given the place an unprecedented development in the course of a few years. A visit to the local bank, which carries on a prosperous business in a spacious, up-to-date

building, is sufficient proof of a thrifty and well-to-do population.

A tall, fine-looking stranger, who has just stepped off the train and passes up the street casting surprised glances to right and left, is asking himself whether the moral and spiritual development of the parish has kept pace with the material progress evidenced on every side. He looks at the well-built schoolhouse. He finds a hospital occupying the ground where there was once a disreputable dram-shop. When he arrives at the parsonage, he turns in at the gate and walks familiarly up the steps and into the vestibule, as if entirely at home. Of the pretty young lady who meets him there he simply inquires for Dean Malm, there being no sign of recognition on either side. Learning that the parson is not at home and not expected till later, he leaves his grip and promises to return.

There is much yet to be seen, for Axel Malm has not been home for years. He takes the old familiar path across the meadow to the churchyard. He finds that the old church has undergone repairs; and the God's Acre near by, which at one time was the most neglected spot in the parish, now bears evidence of being under the care of skillful and reverent hands.

Axel sought his mother's grave. How he had longed for that hallowed spot! In the turmoil of life abroad, during his restless search for knowledge, his soul had not found peace; and here, by the tomb of his sainted mother, he hoped to find it at last.

But the progress and innovation everywhere in evidence made quiet contemplation impossible. Not even here was rest to be found.

On his way from the cemetery, he accosted an old woman who was clearing weeds from the graveled walks:

"Your old village has forged ahead a bit of late, my friend. Who is back of it all — all this progress?"

The woman looked at him quizzically with her dim eyes. The progress the stranger spoke of she had not noticed. Having no idea what he meant, she simply stared blandly at him. Taking for granted that the old woman was an inmate of the near-by poorhouse, he put a question she would understand.

"Well, how are things over there nowadays," he queried, indicating the institution with a slight gesture.

She brightened up at once, and the answer came in an easy flow of words:

"Thank you, kind sir, we old folks never had it better in our lives. Nice and cozy and warm the rooms are, and a drop of afternoon coffee we get every day. And it's no use of the superintendent getting fussy and domineering, for the old parson drops in most every day to kind of look after things...."

He saw that the woman had a great deal more to say, but as he had learnt all that he wanted to know he handed her a coin and moved on through the city of the dead.

"The old parson drops in most every day," she had

said. Could this be same old parson, the recluse of the study that he knew his father to be?

Farther on a man was digging a grave. Axel stopped and spoke.

"There has been some changes around here in the last few years," he suggested.

"Well, I should say there has," the digger agreed, resting his foot on the spade for a moment. "Things were set ahumming by that young engineer all right," he answered with a familiar air.

"Who, if I may ask?"

"Why, the manager of the whole works, Henry Falconer, of course. There's a man and a hustler, — every inch of him. He's put in a lot of money in those moors yonder, and gotten out some, too, let me tell you. He knows all about rational farming and the lumber business and manufacturing. There's a man that can't be beat."

Spitting in his hand, the man fell to digging with a vim for a minute or two while the stranger looked on. When he stopped again, Axel inquired:

"Where does that man live?"

"Up yonder, sir." He pointed to a splendid mansion crowning the nearest hilltop. "We call it the castle, because the boss lives there. They call it Sunnycrest. You go up there, and I warrant you the doors are wide open to you."

Axel looked with admiration at the great white mansion on the crest of the hill from which his sister from her

childhood had been wont to survey her narrow little world.

"You go up there," the laborer urged. "You will not regret it. A man like Henry Falconer is worth knowing. You'll not soon find his equal. And as for Mrs. Falconer, you'll have to look far and wide for another lady like that. God bless them both! They have done a lot for us. If all the bigwigs were like *them*, a fellow wouldn't mind being poor."

With a good-humored smile at the homely eloquence bestowed by the simple laborer on his sister and brother-in-law, Axel Malm made his way towards Sunnycrest.

The location, dominating the entire surroundings, was indeed fit for any castle. Below lay the little industrial town with its pretty cottage homes, each with an attractive, well-kept little garden. Back of this was the forest, and beyond lay the great moors and marshes. From his windows Henry Falconer had a view of the great mills that harnessed the rapids, and of all the little commonwealth created by his engineering skill and ingenuity.

Axel Malm had barely climbed the front steps and put his foot on the spacious piazza of Sunnycrest when he realized that the place was most fitly named.

But when the mistress of this home, tall and stately, met him — queenlike in bearing, he knew, too, why it was popularly known as the castle.

Having been admitted, Axel stood for a moment rigid and silent, to see at what distance Harriet would recog-

nize him. He was conscious of having changed a great deal in appearance since his last visit in the home parish.

But a few steps, and she suddenly abandoned the dignity reserved for strangers for the cordiality more fit for the reception of a brother.

"Why, Axel — is it you?" she exclaimed and clasped her twin brother in a warm embrace.

A moment later they were seated in a charming recess of the house, engrossed in a confidential chat.

"How fine and dignified you look!" Harriet led off, looking squarely into her brother's expressive countenance.

"And how queenlike and gracious my little sister," he repaid her in kind. And a queen you surely are in King Henry's realm."

"No, no, Axel; not a queen, only a wife and a mother," she protested.

"No? Well, that does not interfere with your sovereignty as mistress of this lordly castle," he pursued, humorously applying his late information.

"This is *not* a castle," she corrected him. "It is designed as a bright and comfortable *home*, that and nothing more. To me this is the dearest spot on this earth. 'My home is my church'. The people down there call it 'The Castle,' and if strangers look for luxuries here, they will be disappointed. But anyone who likes to see a real home, full of good cheer, a home designed for use, not for show, will be glad to come here, as we mean that he should be."

"Yes; I understand you quite, and everything here bears you out," he conceded, sweeping the apartment with an admiring look.

"Now you just go on and talk. I'll listen," he urged.

This pleased Harriet, for there was nothing she liked quite so much to talk about as her home.

"In a home, air, light, and water are three essentials for health," she proceeded categorically, as if she were to give a lecture in hygiene. "When Henry and I were to build a home we mere agreed on the principle of high, airy, sunny rooms, and in the matter of furnishing our choice was always furniture, draperies and upholstering that could be kept clean. Furthermore, I like you to know that Henry has made most of the furniture with his own hands, while nearly all the rugs, carpets, curtains, draperies and furniture coverings are my own work. In this way a home becomes one's own in a very special sense."

They rose, and she conducted him through the house. At every turn Axel was confronted with same original feature or arrangement which appealed to him, and he was forced to admit that in the delicate art of home-making Harriet and Henry had succeeded remarkably well.

"If I had not seen other evidence of Henry's creative genius on all sides since my arrival to-day, I should say he missed his natural calling when he did not turn cabinet-maker. I never knew he was so handy with tools."

"Nor that your sister was able to weave such things as

these," Harriet added, pointing to her home-made curtain drapes."

They were artistic, he granted, but, better than that, durable and serviceable. The beauty and fitness of things throughout the house compelled his admiration.

Next they made the round of the lawn and garden, which formed a setting in perfect keeping with the house itself.

Axel had just completed his tour of inspection when Henry Falconer returned home.

After the first warm handshake his first question was, "Well, how do you like Sunnycrest?"

His eyes were on Harriet most of the time, Axel noticed.

"It is simply charming, old boy, — the most harmonious home I have ever seen," he readily granted, "and why shouldn't it be, with my learned sister as the presiding genius," he added slyly.

"You are right, Axel," said Henry, ignoring the good-natured slur, "what would Sunnycrest be without the sun, — a castle without a mistress, a mere house, not a home."

Another ardent disciple of the home cult had been heard from. His pean of praise was suddenly interrupted by noises from the hall betraying the presence of some very live and active members of the family.

In they came, three tall, sturdy boys, their eyes sparkling with exuberant good spirits. Their introduction to the strange uncle proceeded with the usual show of parental pride, or, should we say modesty.

"This is Olov, our oldest son," said the mother.

The boy bowed politely, with something of his mother's grace and dignity.

"Olov can go through with anything he undertakes, but his mind is not yet made up as to what he will do," supplied the father.

"And this is Gustav, the musician, and Eric, the coming engineer."

The introduction over, all three in turn moved over to where their mother stood.

"This is my life guard, as you see. While that stands, who shall dare to molest me?" jested the mistress of the castle, mock-heroically.

They formed a splendid group, both men commented mentally.

Henry Falconer then dropped down easily at the piano and began to play under the inspiration of the moment. The music turned into a hymn in praise of love and domestic felicity.

Axel Malm had come out of a turbulent world to find rest and peace in his native village. He found it no longer a sleeping hamlet, but a town throbbing with life and impulse. And back of it all was love. From the chords that rang from the strings he thought he heard a message which he interpreted thus: Love is the greatest thing in the world; love is the motive power in life; love is that which lends beauty and value to our mortal existence.

"Tell me, Henry," said Axel Malm, as the two men walked down towards the little town, "how all this has been accomplished. All that I have seen and heard since my return home is more like a fairy tale than a reality."

"Well, there isn't much to tell that your eyes have not already told you," the engineer answered. "To use a figure, I might say that when you and I chummed together, I was like a steam engine. It was all there but the steam. I met Harriet. My affection for her created an ambition to do things. She furnished the steam. Her native place became my home. I saw the enormous resources of this district in its forests and its water power. I figured that these people could be helped on their feet, — these sturdy, old-fashioned, conservative folk who have been plodding along all these years tilling their little patches of poor, sour, soggy soil, only perhaps to have the year's harvest ruined by the first night of early frost. Anyone might have figured out that here was a fine opportunity for all concerned to make good money by turning the old forests into lumber and manufactured products. But it fell to my lot to do so and thereby lighten the burdens of these people. I did not do it by paying them in one sum for their timber lots. That would have been no better than trying to help a tramp by giving him something for nothing instead of letting him work for it. True, I purchased the forests, but there was a stipulation in each contract that the seller was to cut the timber himself and put in a certain number of days of work draining the

moors and marshes. You ought to have seen how they worked! I was along myself the first weeks or months to get them fairly started and look after the work. When I had got them to the point where they could see the purpose of draining the morasses, I organized a coöperative company. Now they saw that they were working for their own good, and the result was still greater exertion. This required bodily strength and endurance, so I demonstrated to them the ruinous effect of alcohol on the human system, for only a few of their huskiest men, young or old, could beat me handling the spade. When they expressed surprise at this, I told them the reason, — I had never used strong drink in any form.

“I have said enough. The power and resources, in short, were put to use here; that is what put life and action into this district. But something had to start things going, and that was *love*. Harriet in a letter once called it the power of new birth, and she was right.”





XIV.

Heart Speaking to Heart

Dean Malm and his son sat in the study talking over the events of the years of Axel's absence abroad. The pauses grew longer, and finally the conversation lapsed into silence.

"You have something in your mind, my boy," said the father at length. "Something troubles you, I perceive."

Axel looked into his father's eyes, and saw there what was wanting in his own soul, — the peace that passeth all understanding. He opened his heart to his father as never before.

"Father," he began, "you know with what zest I have enjoyed life's pleasures. Nature always had a great charm for me, and when I saw its myriad forms of life and beauty, a voice within told me that the source of all this must be great and beautiful beyond our ken. When I afterwards mingled with the throngs of the cities, life took on new fascination for me as I observed the thousands of faces and persons and studied the innumerable move-

ments and expressions, multiplying themselves to infinitude like the reflections in the facets of precious gems. As I sat in concert halls, and stood before works of art in the great galleries, new vistas of life opened before me, and all the time I was happy as a prince.

"Thus the years passed. I had used up a great deal of time and money in study and travel, and it was time to think of completing my course for the degree. To acquire that, I had to pursue the study of philosophy with greater zest and life with less. I took to reading although I hated books; they seemed so narrow and lifeless; they choked the pleasure out of life and changed its bright colors into a monotonous drab.

"The more the hues of life faded, the more I read, until it became clear to me that what I had taken for beauty was mere baubles. I took my degree with honors, and flattered myself with being a better scientist and philosopher the deader I became to the world. Father, I have come home a weary and discouraged man."

"And the first thing that meets you here," said the parson, "is a note from the wonderland of your youth. You have heard them sing the praise of love up at Sunnycrest, I am sure."

"How do you know, father?"

"One might assume as much, even though one were not told."

"Told, and by whom?"

"My knowledge of human nature, or, I may say, love

tells me that. Love gives us to understand men. No one ever knew the deeps of human nature as He who was called the Son of Man; and we know our fellow men in the degree that we know Him and are known by Him."

The son looked at his father in surprise. All things were different in his old home. Even his father was a changed man. From letters he had surmised as much, but now that he was confronted with the evidence of it, his astonishment was complete.

"You are surprised, my son, and well you may be, for a great change has come over me — a change that cannot be explained, only experienced. When at your age I was engaged in laying up knowledge as the miser hoards money, I met her who became your mother. Her influence upon me was as dominant as that exercised by Harriet upon her husband. All that you have told me of your interest in life I recall from my own life at the time when Magnhild lived. Our heart relations were most intimate, yet when she left me she whispered in my ear that her deepest experience of life she had never been able to confide to me; that was too beautiful, too sacred for words.

"I ought to have noticed from the first that the awakening in the parish was due to her, not to me. Not till twenty years after did I realize it. Then I also knew that the light and warmth she diffused among the people came not from herself but from Christ in her. For being one with Christ, that was the great secret of her life."

Father and son, after having exchanged confidences, sat

mute for some moments, with a mutual sense of having been brought closer together.

Then the dean continued:

"We are born with the power to love, and that is our greatest faculty. Thereby we are drawn upwards, while all other powers tend to drag us down. He, therefore, who would escape being drawn downwards, must let himself be drawn Godward by love.

"It is not enough to possess an idealistic outlook upon life, to think nobly and act rightly. There is but one name in which man is saved, one way of salvation. If we will not follow that, we must go astray, but if we choose that name and walk in that way, then the words are true of us: 'As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God.'

"You have now come to the point where you must choose that way. You can no longer afford to do without that which gives value and meaning to life. My son, go, like Nicodemus, to the Master of Nazareth; He will teach you all that you need to know for the life eternal. My words and theories are feeble, but He who spoke with power will prove a better guide, for He is Himself the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one can know God, except through Him."





XV.

Impending Disaster

Henry Falconer was a man of enterprise. When he was engaged to Harriet Malm, he made her home district his own, the chosen field for his endeavors. The backward old parish was to be recreated by his initiative and business acumen.

He purchased forests and acquired water power, built sawmills and factories, drained the moorlands and marshes, and thereby set a stream of gold flowing through his fingers out into the pauperized district. And not only material gold, but also what is worth more than gold, namely, a good example of energy and enterprise, good advice, and good will to all.

His influence was overpowering; everybody looked up to him and patterned after him. He proved himself a man to be depended on. He made himself worthy of their confidence. For Falconer, the trained civil engineer, to take advantage of these simple countrymen in exploiting the enormous natural resources that had slumbered in their possession would have been an easy thing, but he did not

do it. Everything purchased by him was paid for up to its full value. Furthermore, he gave the seller an idea as to the best way of placing his newly acquired capital.

In order to shut out other men, whose business principles were quite the reverse of his own square dealing, Falconer was forced into starting enterprises that he would have preferred to postpone until some later day. Great sums of money were required, and, manage as he would, he was one day confronted with the bald fact that his various enterprises had grown beyond the means at his disposal.

"You are concealing something from me, Henry," said his wife, entering his office and finding him half submerged in journals and ledgers. It was the very day he made his startling discovery.

Looking up at her, his first impulse was to deny her statement, but he could not. Her straightforward way of going right to the heart of the matter made evasion futile. He said nothing.

"What is it, Henry? Don't you think I can bear to hear the truth?" she pursued.

"Yes, you are strong, — it is you that is holding me up in all my undertakings," he owned.

"Well, tell me, then."

Still he hesitated. At length he began to speak in a low voice:

"Harriet. Look out of this window. All that you see down there has been built up by your love. This is all your work. The children in all those laboringmen's

homes, who came pale and puny from the cities, and have grown healthy and strong in their new environment; the sick, who formerly lay neglected or entirely uncared for in their old huts, and who now enjoy the best of care at our hospital, — all these owe their changed condition to you. The men in the factories and their wives and children have you to thank for their betterment. Don't you hear voices of gratitude rising from yonder valley to the Lady of the Castle?"

They stood side by side at the window looking out over the busy, pleasant panorama. There was the railway station; there the great factory buildings stretched their lengths by the river's edge; there lay in long rows the neat workingmen's homes, with their little gardens; there was the savings bank, the school, the hospital, — all in the bright sunshine, with the dark forests as a somber background for the cheerful picture of thrift and prosperity.

Her eyes used to rest contentedly upon her husband's creation, but now they sought the dark border beyond. Was the great beast of disaster to come out of the black depths of the forest and swallow them up, herself and the knight of her heart, and all the fruits of his labors?

"I see ominous shadows drawing near. What is it that threatens us?" she pleaded to know.

He sank into his office chair without a word. She stood looking at him for an instant, then spoke with all the tenderness and fortitude of her gentle but brave womanly heart:

"Henry, whatever happens, we have one another and the children. We are rich and happy, though all else were lost."

His face brightened.

"Yes, with such possessions nothing can make us poor," he said, straightening up with reasserted energy. "Forgive me, Harriet, for being weak for one moment, but the thought of you and the children disheartened me. Well, I must tell you, — everything seems lost. I can no longer keep afloat. Some things, at least, must go by the board."

He looked firmly at his wife, proud of a helpmate brave enough to look him squarely in the face at such a moment.

She smiled.

"Was it so hard to say that?"

"Yes, for your sake, and the children's," he explained. "But I see now how strong you are. You were great in inspiring the work that has been accomplished here, but you are greater still in this moment, — smiling in the midst of impending ruin. With you, Harriet, I am rich."

"And I am richer still."

The pair were closing their account with the world and, finding their earthly fortune gone, yet rejoiced in the possession of all that is worth having.

"But everything can be cleared up, I hope, so no one will be the loser on your account?" she inquired hesitantly.

"Yes, everything."

"I knew it," she said, reassured of his staunch, unsullied honor.

Tense silence ensued. Then she spoke again.

"Henry, dear, we are going to get along famously after the crash. You will secure a position elsewhere and we will take a wee bit of a cottage that I can take care of myself. There we will live happy and contented in our little corner of the world, you and I and the boys. We will see more of each other there than here, where so many duties take us in different paths.

"Well, yes, that will be fine — for us," he interposed thoughtfully, "but what will become of our work here, and all these people? How can we leave these hundreds of workers in the lurch? Can we permit them to be driven from house and home, back to the poor quarters and slums of the cities, when the factories are closed?"

She stood at the window again, surveying the industrial community which was her husband's creation, in spite of what he said of her part in it. Her heart revolted at the thought of abandoning all this to ruin and decay.

"No, Henry, we cannot leave them. That would be rank egotism and ingratitude. Till now we have merely worked; henceforth we must fight. We must struggle through at any cost. Look at the river down there. Where it flows through bottoms and meadows, it has no power. But let it force its way between cliffs and down precipices, and its strength is measured in thousands of horse powers. We shall struggle through by sheer force of will power and of love for the task, and when we are victorious, life

shall mean more to us, and we shall more fully realize the power of love."

He looked at her in admiration, while her words steeled him against adversity and fired him for the future task. Her beauty and determination, her splendid zeal dazzled him as it had once dazzled her father.

"Harriet, what is it that makes you so heroic and stout-hearted?" he asked in bewilderment.

She smiled.

"My love for you," she answered simply, bending over to kiss him.

Her courage had inspired him with new ambition. Her love aroused within him the will to fight and win, and he felt his strength as the strength of pent up waters. His heart throbbed violently as he spoke with a steely glint of determination in his eyes:

"We shall win — you and I. My heart tells me that victory will be ours."





XVI.

Death at the Threshold

Henry Falconer closed his ledger with a sharp thud. The crisis was yet to come, but he would master the situation. It had been a terrible struggle. He could well understand how men who have to fight single-handed, without support, moral or physical, give up in despair and end their life with a bullet. He had lived for weeks and months under constant stress. His hair had turned gray at the temples, and his hand had lost its steadiness. At times everything had been at stake, his personal honor in the first place, for if the crash should come, would not the blame fall on him for not having averted it in time. The manager of the great works had not been able for some time to pass the cottage of any of his workingmen without casting an envious look into their care-free homes.

Now that the strain was removed, he scarcely had time to relax before another ordeal confronted him. For after the great test of her courage was over, Harriet collapsed, body and soul, and fell helpless as a babe.

The doctor was on his first visit, and Henry sat in the next room awaiting his finding. Others, too, were waiting. On the lawn outside was a little crowd of people from the shops who had come up to learn the condition of the Lady of the Castle. In the dining room sat the three sons silently waiting for the doctor to reappear. All Sunnycrest was in breathless expectation of the physician's verdict. What would it be without its mistress? What would these boys be without their mother, this man without his mate?

Her recent words of cheer and comfort came to him again in that moment: "Till now we have merely worked; henceforth we must fight. We shall struggle through by sheer force of will power and of love for the task, and when we are victorious, life shall mean more to us, and we shall more fully realize the power of love." They were a ray of light in the surrounding gloom. In that moment he knew that love is stronger than death.

Finally the doctor, an old friend of the family, appeared.

"You are calm; so you may go in to her. What may happen no one can tell. This night will decide. I will return later." That was all the comfort the physician had to offer.

Henry Falconer's searching look was almost too much even for the tried nerves of the medical man. He took a step back. Did Henry surmise what he dared not tell him — that his wife was likely to die that very night? Were the words meant for him or for the stricken man

himself, when he spoke as if quoting from memory: "I know that Harriet belongs to life and to love."

To Dr. Holmes these words had a strange sound. He looked at his friend in wonderment.

"Yes," he replied impressively. "You are right. Your wife belongs to the only true life and to that eternal love of which the present is but a faint reflection."

The doctor bowed to his friend and departed, glad to escape the duty of an explanation which was beyond his powers. He was well aware that many of his patients, when all hope of recovery was gone, could die in peace, strengthened by their unfaltering faith in the life to come. He had great admiration for Lady Falconer, but was never fully able to understand her; she seemed to move on a higher plane. Might it not be that she had begun to live that higher life even here below? If so, all the better for her, reasoned Dr. Holmes; for he verily believed that she would not see another day.

Returning from his call, Dr. Holmes made straight for the sideboard and poured up a big glass of strong wine, which he drained in one draft. That was his habit when he had been attending a very serious case.

"Poor Henry," he mumbled to himself as he tossed down a second glass.

Henry himself did not resort to any such means of palliating his troubles. He was too much of a man to use makeshifts. He bravely faced his sorrows to fight them down.

He entered the sickroom and sat down at the bedside. There was now little left of his wife's beauty and strength. Where she now lay with closed eyes and gaunt features, she was merely one of the mass of humanity who had sank under the too heavy burden laid upon her.

She opened her eyes and looked at him with the deep look of one who believes in life and in love. In an instant he dismissed his fears, for how could any one look like that, if life's flame was flickering in the socket and the blood was growing cold. With stout heart he still held to his belief that with her firm faith in life and her all-absorbing affection for him she could not die and leave him.

While he was still looking into her eyes, the spark of life and love seemed to die out of them, leaving nothing but a shadow. He shrank back, and a chill permeated his whole being.

"Henry, — Henry, why do you go away? Don't leave me alone," she pleaded pitifully.

"Dearest, I am here with you; I am not going," he reassured her. He took her cold hand and pressed it between his own to make her feel his presence, but still she pleaded in a feeble, childlike voice:

"Don't leave me, Henry, — please don't."

He was almost paralyzed with dismay and found not a word to say to soothe her fears. It was not he that was going, but at this moment he felt as though she was going away, passing into the great unsearchable gloom and leaving him alone in a starless, hopeless void.

"Henry, hold me fast," she begged. "Hold my hands, — I cannot go now, — I cannot leave you."

He feels that her hold on life is slipping, and she no longer belongs to him. But he must try to give her such comfort as he is capable of.

"Be calm, dearest, — and take this," he says, offering her a drop or two of a poison left by the doctor to be used in "extreme need." To him it was like consigning her to death.

The poison acts, deadening pain and calming the nerves, throwing her very soul into a stupor, it seems. Breathing is easier, the choking of the throat and the pressure on the chest being relieved. Once again she is able to smile, though faintly and artificially, and to speak.

"Forgive me, dearest, for a moment of weakness," she said in a whisper. "Forgive me for doubting the power of life and of love. I know now that if I go away to rest it will be only to wake up with new strength in the other world. Besides, I would still live for you and the children in the work that our love made possible."

Her husband was mute in his distraction. It was revolting to think that medical means should be required to give her back faith in that which she had always believed in.

"Henry," she continued, "now I understand better than ever before the meaning of the words, 'Love never faileth,' for when we pass away, the works of love remain, and we live on, here on earth, though departed hence. Love never faileth, for love is of God."

Henry watched as a veil seemed to fall over her eyes and her mind began to wander. At length she closed her eyes and fell into a light slumber. He sat at her side with face hidden in his hands. Despair was in his heart. Faith — love, — all was a delusion.

Suddenly a hand touched his shoulder, and the doctor stood beside him.

"She is sleeping," he said. "Will you step out with me a moment."

Henry followed him from the room.

"Here, have a glass or two of this. You need a bracer to-night. Under such a strain one must not stand too stubbornly on principle."

With these words the physician gently patted his shoulder and poured out a glass of ardent liquor. Half distraught, Henry took the glass and was about to put it to his lips when he suddenly stopped short. A voice within him spoke: "Drink, Henry! Drink, and befog your brains; then go in to your wife and see her die. This is only the beginning. You will do worse things than that, Henry Falconer, now that you have lost faith in everything."

He set down the glass — he could not drink that night. The doctor sought to argue him into it.

"No; — don't ask me; — I simply can't," he stuttered in a forced, unnatural tone."

"Queer chap, that," muttered the doctor to himself, slightly offended, yet not without admiration for the man's force of character. When he saw Henry pass him and

disappear into the sickroom with bowed head and an uncanny expression in his face rarely seen in persons while in possession of their reason, the doctor drew the conclusion not unnatural to a drink-befuddled brain that a miracle must transpire that night, or Henry Falconer would turn insane. And although a man who believed in nothing that could not be explained and to whom there was no world beyond this visible one, Dr. Holmes persistently hoped for a miracle.

Henry found his wife still asleep. Dropping quietly down on a chair at the bedside, he sat motionless for a long time, neither seeing nor hearing those who came and went.

“Henry, — my son!”

It was her father, the venerable parson, who stood beside him, tall though bowed with grief, mild though solemn, and most remarkably calm.

“How is it with you, my boy?” he asked.

Henry did not reply. His thoughts were all for Harriet, and he wondered why the father of a dying daughter should be thinking of *him* just then.

The old parson looked concernedly at him, then at Harriet, and there was a bright, far-seeing look in his kind gray eyes. He had penetrated so far into the mysteries of the other world, the world of faith, that he could see light where others saw nothing but darkness. Not that he was untouched by human misery, and immune to sorrow, for his sympathies were most profound; but he knew how little human power avails in time of need and put implicit trust in the unseen Comforter.

Slowly and feelingly he repeated the words of the Saviour: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."

A ray of hope kindled in Henry's eyes and died as quickly.

"Yes, father, the Bible has it that way, and you who live in a different world from mine hold to that, of course. But to me that is nothing but words — words. Besides, the Bible makes no secret of the fact that the man, whose sickness was not unto death, actually died. Let us be honest, as the Bible is on this point."

The dean was not taken aback by Henry's bitter retort.

"Yes, Lazarus died, that is true, but he rose again," he answered mildly.

"Father," pleaded Henry Falconer with a child's meekness, "father, give me back my faith in life, my trust in love, or I cannot endure this! We had that faith and trust, Harriet and I. It was the great thing in our life, it was power, riches, happiness. Now she is dying, — she is dead, lost to me already, — and with her faith is gone. It is as though we — she and I — had never lived. — Father (his voice quavered in agony) — father, save me, for my children's sake."

On the verge of despair the stricken man knelt before the old parson, embracing his knees in supplication.

Another than Dean Malm might have protested that we must not pray to any mortal man, helpless as ourselves; but the old divine realized that it was not to him that

Henry directed his prayer, but to that power which he represented.

A solemn moment of silence, then the parson spoke:

"The time and place may seem peculiar to us, but it is God's chosen time and place. At the very gate of death I must interpret to you the mysteries of life and faith. Be assured, my son, that this sickness is not unto death, though to human eyes it may so appear. You say that Lazarus died; — true, but only in order that he might live again. You say it seems as if you had never lived; that is too true, for you are as dead spiritually as Lazarus was bodily when laid in his tomb. But death is life's gateway. We know not what life is, till we have tasted of death's bitter cup."

Wonderful paradoxes, these. "Words, words," Henry Falconer would have called them, had it not dawned upon him, while the old man spoke, that this doubtless explained the great change that had come over his own life, — the miracle of being reborn of the Spirit.

The question of Nicodemus, "How can a man be born when he is old," was in Henry's mind, and he inquired:

"Father, by what power did you become a regenerated man?"

"By faith in Him who said: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.' "

Profoundly solemn sounded these divine words, repeated

by a believing father at the bedside of his dying daughter. They carried enthusiasm and power, but more of conviction, the thing Henry Falconer most needed in this hour of trial. He realized fully that all things earthly were vain and perishable; all was dust and would sooner or later return to dust; there was nothing in heaven or earth to put faith in — except possibly in Him who at the portals of death long ago spoke those words, the only true gospel of life.

Both men sat beside the deathbed, the elder with young, vitalizing hope in his heart, the younger distraught with doubt. Meanwhile Harriet slept a sleep very like death.

Henry Falconer was on the border line between the temporal and the eternal world. He saw dimly a beam of supernal light penetrate the gloom of temporal existence, yet his whole mind was on his dying wife, and his back, as it were, was turned in the direction whence that light issued. One thing had become clear to him — should Harriet survive, then, and only then, he would recognize the Man of Nazareth as the master of life and death, yea, the resurrection and the life.





XVII.

The Coming of Little Hans

Harriet did survive. The two fought their way through, — she through the physical, he through the spiritual crisis. The invalid's strength returned, however, by very slow degrees, so imperceptibly, indeed, that Henry at times despaired of any improvement. When she was well enough to be moved, she was carried daily into the sitting room, where she reclined on a couch day after day, present in body but peculiarly absent in mind.

Little by little things readjusted themselves to former conditions outwardly; but to Henry it seemed as though the mental contact between himself and Harriet was not properly restored. He began to fear that the few drops of poison administered in a critical moment might have had a baneful effect on her mental powers. She never spoke of her dreadful inner struggles that night and never with one word referred to that hour when doubt obscured the things which she held most precious in life.

Henry had been confronted with the terrors of death, but not only that, he had also seen a glimpse of the glory of Him who is the resurrection and the life. He went often to the parson for comfort, feeling that his present position was untenable, his life void and inadequate, yet his thoughts centered on Harriet, and he sought from the dean very much the same kind of comfort that she had been wont to give.

The experienced divine understood him better than he knew himself. He might have advised him in the words of the Master, "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me," but he knew that what he had he could not sell without great hardship to many. It was not worldly goods, — it was Harriet who stood in his way, and her life having been spared, the devout father firmly believed she would be the first to enter upon the new life.

Henry's visits to the parsonage grew less frequent, and ultimately ceased. The memory of past trials faded before the cares of the present. He was waiting for his wife's complete recovery, hoping that this would restore the beauty and felicity of their home life. He was setting much store by the home-coming of the boys for Christmas as a revivifying element.

Christmas vacation brought the boys home, and with them the spirit of youth and enthusiasm entered the house anew. The weather was severe, and many a nose and ear was nipped by frost, but this had no terror for the

youngsters. The irksome confinement of the long fall term at school made every moment of freedom doubly precious, and now was their time to make the most of the opportunity for true winter sports. There was excellent coasting from the top of the hill all the way down to the village. On their bobsled they shot down the incline numberless times, always with jubilant cheers, and every time they gained the crown of the hill, tugging and puffing, there was another hearty cheer in store for the mother watching them from her window. The consciousness that her eyes were on them, proudly following their every movement, added zest to their sport.

At that moment Harriet thought herself the happiest and richest of mothers. The presence of her bright-eyed, sturdy boys had dispelled the melancholy gloom that still lingered over the mind of the convalescent.

She went in to Henry, who sat bending over his accounts.

"Come, let me show you something," she said, taking him by the arm and leading him over to the window. "Have you ever seen a prettier sight?" she pursued, and as they watched the sport of their boys on the hillside, old memories came back, one by one, and life seemed to take on brightness and beauty anew.

"Yes, once," he answered reminiscently, kissing her tenderly, as if welcoming back the strong, cheerful, buoyant Harriet of former days. Life and love again beamed from her deep eyes, in fulfillment of her own prediction, made

before the great struggle, — “We will then have a deeper knowledge of life and know more fully what a power love is.”

A season of great domestic happiness followed, raised to a high pitch by the ebullient spirit of the boys. Henry Falconer played with new inspiration to the guests who came up evening after evening to listen, and to enjoy the unbounded hospitality of the house. Mistress Harriet's eyes beamed with a new light.

* * *

Not many months later, it was an open secret that a little stranger was expected at Sunnycrest. If the fact had been published in the local paper it could not have been more widely known. Every morning people would look up the hill too see if the flag was hoisted — the sign of arrival. The expected child was the center of interest long before its birth, as it was to be the object of the collective affection of the community ever after.

One spring day, when nature was coming to life again, and the air was filled with the jubilant warble of returned song-birds, the little guest, a tiny boy, made his appearance at Sunnycrest. His eyes were those of his mother, bright, sunshiny eyes, in which a shadow of gloom which was to be ever a mystery to the mother had not yet appeared. The father had been wishing for a daughter, his instinct yearning for some weaker being to foster and protect, and although disappointed in this, yet his wish came true in an unlooked for manner, in that the child, who was named

after his grandfather and came to be affectionately called Little Hans by all, was puny and delicate enough to make a special appeal to the parental heart. The child, which made so great a demand on his parents, also grew to be the strongest link in the chain that united them, and his coming measurably deepened their mutual regard and increased their domestic felicity.

When the old parson was confronted with the newborn grandson, he looked long and thoughtfully at the bit of humanity, as if seeing something about the child that had escaped the notice of all others.

"How do you like our baby, father?" asked Harriet when the old man remained silent.

Then, looking into the mother's radiant face, he said impressively: "This child will be a source of much sorrow to you, Harriet, but of still greater joy. *Ille faciet* — he shall do it. — —"

A few moments later the parson took his leave, and was driven to his home by Henry. Short as was the trip, it took quite a while, for Dean Malm wanted to greet and speak to every one they met and have a look at everything they passed by.

That evening there was mourning at Sunnycrest, in the village, and throughout the parish. Dean Malm had passed peacefully away, falling asleep in the Lord while stooping over his study desk as in meditation. Before him was an unfinished letter to his son Axel, beginning thus:

"Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord,

According to thy word in peace"

Here his pen had dropped from his hand, leaving these words of the righteous Simeon as a last message.

A few days later a funeral procession passed from the parsonage to the churchyard, the entire congregation, together with Axel and Harriet, and Henry Falconer with his sons, following the reverend old pastor to his last resting place. —

The next morning Axel Malm was to leave by an early train. When he stepped out on the platform in the misty morning air a tall, thickset man was there ahead of him.

"May I have a word with Mr. Malm?" he asked after the exchange of greetings. They walked a few paces aside.

"You must study for the ministry, my friend," said the man; "that was the wish of your father. And that is our wish, too, for we want a Malm in our parsonage and in our pulpit."

Axel was deeply moved. He knew now that his father's labors had not been in vain.

"I am studying divinity now," said Axel after a pause. "But I cannot hope to fill my father's place. I thank you for your kindness, just the same. At any rate you people have a Malm at Sunnycrest — don't forget that."

"Yes, I know, — the engineer and his wife. They teach us how to work. But we want some one to teach us how to live. That you must do."

The tall man looked cordially into Axel's eyes as he spoke, then shook his hand warmly, tipped his cap slightly,

and went his way.. But his words sank deep into Axel's mind, as expressing, through the mouth of another, the last will of his father.

Now that the parson's household was dissolved, May Woods, the ward brought there from the moor farm, was transferred to Sunnycrest to be nursery maid for Little Hans.





XVIII.

The Little Invalid

Many were the bright dreams of their future that Harriet had dreamt by the cradle of her baby boys. The mother's eye had foreseen in them high ambitions to be crowned with great accomplishments. Her hand had guided them in fancied crusades and explorations long before they were able to stand on their own legs.

But in the case of Little Hans her expectations were raised to still greater heights. She bore within her a very clear presentiment that this boy was to be something more to her than all the rest. Her motherly instinct had told her so before he was born, and now the idea had taken the form of unquestioned certitude.

Ille faciet — what did her father mean that her last born was to accomplish? Why did she not ask him? Did he intimate his wish that he should follow in his own footsteps by entering the ministry and possibly succeed him in his own pulpit?

To this she had positive objections. Religion was nothing to her; she felt no need of it herself, and did not believe that any intelligent person needed it. For her father's sake she had attended church regularly, but merely as a matter of form, and after her father's death her church-going ceased. She was completely satisfied with the world in which she was now living, and had no need of knowing or preparing for any other.

Henry, too, had an extraordinary affection for the youngest son. A room was set aside for Little Hans when he reached two years of age. That became the sanctuary of the home. It was situated between the parents' chamber and the living room, a cheerful, sunlit room all in white and kept scrupulously clean. Here the parents would spend hours with the lad, in play or instruction; here they would sit dreaming proud dreams of his future. Here, too, Little Hans was supreme. Everything was done according to his wishes, from the time that he had a will of his own, and his commands were instantly obeyed. From his limited realm the little autocrat ruled Sunnycrest absolutely, and Sunnycrest ruled the entire district.

Little Hans was unconscious of his power. Not strong enough to be up except for short intervals, the puny monarch spent most of the time in bed. When he did leave his bed it was usually exchanged for his mother's lap, or the arms of his father, who took turns with May, the nursery maid, in carrying him about the house. The fond hopes of the parents for an improvement in the child's

health were not realized. Despite all the care and coddling, the little body grew still more frail, the thin, pale face grew smaller, the bright eyes with the mysterious shadows in them grew still more dark, contrasting weirdly with the sickly white countenance.

Such was Little Hans to look at. But inwardly he was developing meanwhile at a pace which ought to have told the parents that their baby boy would not stay with them long. True, all their boys were uncommonly gifted, but the elder sons were not to be compared with Little Hans in that respect.

On his sixth birthday the boy received a comfortable little chair as a present from his father. He was greatly delighted with the gift, and for the rest of the day could hardly be induced to leave it.

"It's almost like sitting in mama's lap," he commented oldly. And no chair could have been given higher praise.

Little Hans began to ask questions, and when he learnt that some living tree had had to be cut down to provide material for his little chair his joy was subdued, and tears came into his eyes. His father was obliged to dispel his childish grief by playing the boys' favorite melodies on the piano. Harriet was moved to tears by the tender sentimentality of her boy, but he did not notice it, his attention being wholly absorbed by the music.

When Henry ceased playing, Little Hans came over to him.

"Papa, who taught you how to play?" he asked. Hen-

ry Falconer had had a number of teachers, but he felt that a mere mention of their names would not have answered the boy's question. So he replied:

"Just now it was you that taught me how."

The lad looked at his father questioningly. His expression was not of doubt, and yet not of confidence.

"Then I can play, too, can't I, papa?" he argued.

Papa was trapped by his own reasoning.

"Well, why not? Suppose you try."

Henry Falconer became so interested in learning what musical talent the lad might have that he forgot the risk of letting him try and the disappointment that a failure would bring.

Against his wife's protest he carried the boy over to the instrument and seated him before the keyboard. But no sooner had he left him there than he saw his mistake. When the puny form sank limply together on the chair, he hastened to pick him up before he had struck a note, this to spare him the disappointment that he himself already felt.

The little invalid threw both arms about his father's neck and wept.

"Papa, I will never, never be able to play, though I can hear music within me any time," he complained faintly, with tears in his eyes.

His father placed him in a sofa, wiping his tears and seeking to cheer him by fondly stroking his cheek.

"Now, don't cry, Little Hans," he said tenderly. "You

must understand that none of us, not even the greatest musicians, are able to play the finest melodies they hear in their own fancy."

"What becomes of them, then?"

"That I can't say. Perhaps they are not entirely lost, but reproduced in some other way. Your mother, for instance, never plays the piano, as you know; still whatever she does seems like sweet tones of a song, and wherever she goes people look at her as if they were listening to charming music."

"How can that be?" inquired the lad thoughtfully, his face brightening at the reply.

"It comes from the great love for you and me and your brothers and for all the people."

This gave Little Hans so much to ponder on that he forgot to ask any more questions. When May came in and suggested that he take a rest, he gladly complied.

Had Dean Malm been living, Henry would have sought him that moment; now he sought his grave instead. But the mute stone had no reply to the questions that pleaded for an answer.

It was a stormy day. Henry buttoned his overcoat tightly and, with hands tucked into the pockets, braved the fierce wind unflinchingly. Conscious of his robust vitality, he extended his walk for several miles into the country, enjoying the physical struggle with the elements. He returned home with ruddy face and an air of determination about him which told Harriet that he had reached some important decision.

A few days later Henry Falconer and his wife left for Stockholm with their youngest son. His state of health was such that a specialist had to be consulted.

The renowned physician made his diagnosis and, calling the father into his private office, took him into his confidence.

"I can do nothing," he said frankly. "The lad may live for months, perhaps for years, but there is no help for him."

The father refused to accept the verdict of science.

"Doctor, I am a man of means. Name any amount you please for your services, but make my boy well," he implored.

The noted physician merely shook his head.

"My dear Mr. Falconer," he said feelingly, "you have my heartfelt sympathy, but for your boy I can do nothing — positively nothing."

With bent head and in the attitude of a convicted man, Henry Falconer heard the verdict pronounced over his beloved Little Hans.

But when he rejoined Harriet and the boy he bore his head resolutely.

"We are going to Copenhagen to-morrow," he said when they reached the hotel.

His wife said nothing, but Little Hans inquired in anxious tones:

"Is it very far, papa?"

"Not very, my boy. You go to sleep in Stockholm on

the night train and wake up in Copenhagen the next morning."

This did not satisfy the boy.

"I am so tired, papa," said he. "I can't travel any farther. I want to go home."

It was so decided. Not that the father gave up hope of relief, for had not the doctor spoken of months and years? They could go to the Danish capital later, but go they must, for there help was surely to be found. On that point Henry was so positive that Harriet came to believe it too.





XIX.

An Angel in the House

They returned home with heavy hearts. Day by day the pressure on their minds increased, until their throats choked with despair.

Henry Falconer worked as never before. The nervous restlessness that had seized him soon affected his wife also. When she was with her sick boy, a thousand duties seemed to call her away, and away from him, she had no peace until she was again by his side.

Fortunately, May remained perfectly calm. Little Hans was never so contented as when she sat talking with him. She spoke so low that no one else could hear, and none inquired into the subject of their conservation.

One day in the fall Harriet in passing his room overheard Little Hans complaining to his father —

“Papa, must I always lie abed like this? Can’t I ever, ever get up?”

She was glad that the boy had never put that question to her, and she was on the point of running away so as not to hear the father's reply. But she remained and listened, steadying her faint frame against a chair. This is what she heard:

"No, no, my lad, you will get well some day, maybe very soon. Now don't cry, Hans. You used to be such a little man. — There, that's a brave boy!"

The boy braced up a bit at this, but soon relapsed.

"I suppose it's only the big boys that are 'brave little men'," he reflected sadly. They can do anything, but I can't even try."

"My boy, don't say that," the father protested, "they are not the only ones. It is no great proof of manliness to do things when one is strong and able. I think *you* much more brave and manly to lie here and bear your sickness so patiently and without a word of complaint."

The parent made the most of the argument, and it set the boy to thinking. He was determined to bear up bravely for a time, but it could not be for ever. So the question came again:

"Yes, papa, but how long must I lie here this way?"

Henry had evaded it before; would he be able to do so again, Harriet wondered, where she stood listening still.

"Till you get stronger, my boy."

"When will that be?" the lad pursued, determined not to be put off.

For a moment Henry Falconer searched his mind for the

right words. His wife was keenly alert to know whether her husband actually believed in their child's recovery, a point on which he had always avoided committing himself.

The answer came at length. It was simply this:

"When God wills it."

Henry Falconer speaking of God! It was a great surprise to Harriet. Seldom had that word passed his lips in discussion or every-day conversation, never in such a connection.

Little Hans, too, was very much surprised.

"God — do you know anything about *Him*, papa?" he asked. "You never spoke of Him to me, nor has mama."

"Now think, Hans, — has no one ever mentioned God to you?"

"Oh, yes, May has," the boy owned. "She used to tell me to pray to God when I have pains, and he would make me well. But I tell her there's no one that can make me well but a doctor in Copenhagen, because papa and mama have told me so, and they know better than she does."

"Are you sure they do?"

"Yes, because all she knows is what she reads in one book. But you have a great many books to learn from. May's book is only a story-book, I guess."

By now Little Hans had forgotten his first question and his father did all he could to lead him on in his new line of thought.

"Well, what all does May have to tell you?" he prompted.

"Oh, lots and lots of things. She has a great big story-book, and a fine one too — finer and bigger than any that the boys have. I can't tell you all there is in it, for I forget so many things when the pains come. But I'll tell you, papa — he speaks in a half-whisper — when it hurts the worst, I think of some of May's stories, and that helps."

The mother could no longer remain outside. She entered the room and joined the two.

"Mama, I knew all the while that you were out there," said the boy with a smile.

She nodded to Henry, and after wrapping the child in a blanket, took him in her lap.

"Now, tell us some of May's stories," said she.

The boy proceeded to tell his father and mother what they should have told him long ago. The stories from "May's story-book," which was none other than a copy of the Holy Bible, his childish fancy wrought into fantastic forms, yet they were easily recognizable as being from Holy Writ. He made his parents see through his own childish eyes the city eternal with its streets of gold, the innumerable chorus of angels singing hosannas before the throne of God. In the heaven conceived of by the child's mind all had their musical instruments, and all could play even the sublimest melodies that came to them in thoughts or dreams. And in this heaven no one was sick or tired, and no one was too small to be there. It was a land of wonder and mystery, yet as real to the mind of Little Hans as the world in which he was now living.

The little invalid spoke at first rapidly, eagerly; then slowly and with subdued enthusiasm, until his eyes closed and he fell asleep with his head pillowed on his mother's breast.

For Harriet and Henry Falconer this temporal world had until now been quite enough. Their eyes had never sought the far coast of that land of bliss beyond the blue ocean of ethereal space. Suddenly their own child presented that eternal paradise to their vision as the goal of his hopes, the scene of a life better than this, a wished for haven of joy and peace the very thought of which allayed his bodily pains. Thus the heaven of the child's faith became real for the first time to his father and mother, the first object of their dawning faith in things unseen.

This changed many things in the lives of Henry and Harriet, who hitherto had believed only in the "things that are seen." When they began to believe in a heaven for their little boy they had unknowingly taken the first step in the path of faith.

"There is an angel in the house," the servants confided to one another, adding, "God bless Little Hans."

And God did bless him. The little invalid was always patient and cheerful, and as it was, his influence was greater by far than if he had been healthy and strong. No one spoke aloud when Little Hans had a moment's sleep, and any one was pleased to sit at the bedside and help him while away the tedious hours.

No one left the sick-room without some new idea or

point of view suggested by the boy, who in his quiet way preached more powerfully from his sick-bed than many a pastor from his pulpit.

But his cheeks grew ever paler, his eyes more dark and sunken, and his heart fluttered feverishly.

Father and mother grew paler, too, and the older boys dampened their youthful ardor and grew silent and thoughtful. Olov would write little verses to amuse the poor little fellow, and Gustav played his best pieces for Hans upon his slightest suggestion.

Through long days and nights Harriet and Henry took turns at watching by the bedside while life and death struggled for the possession of their son. The battle was as decisive for them as for him. For if Little Hans, the angel of their home, should depart, what would become of them? They dared not follow out the thought.

Harriet recalled how this child had come to her as a harbinger of a new life, a messenger of that love which had been the greatest thing in her past life, and he had become dearer to her than any of the other sons, although she despaired of his ever amounting to anything, commonly speaking.

To Henry, Little Hans was a direct gift from Him out of whose hand Harriet had been given back to him in a dark hour. He had come as an earnest of earthly affection, but also as a messenger from the Ruler of life and death to tell of His divine love and awaken faith out of dark despair.



XX.

The Crisis

One night in the spring came the crucial test for the parental hearts. The weather was mild, and a window in the sick-room was left open. The moonlight cast a weird sheen over the park, accentuating the solemn stillness that reigned about the solitary mansion on the hill. All seemed to know as by some premonition that a struggle was to come that night, a struggle which might be the last for Little Hans, crowning the patient sufferer with the halo of martyrdom.

Father and mother both knew it, and dreaded the thought of it. The little hero had fought bravely and long for his crown, and it would be well indeed with him, if he should go to his eternal rest; but, alas, how dark, how empty life would be to those left behind!

It was hardest for the mother, who was attached to her child with numberless bonds known only to herself. With her great fear of death, she nevertheless, seeing the all-conquerer approaching, would have gladly given her own life to preserve that of her boy.

Henry fell asleep, exhausted as he was by many days and nights of anxious watching, but Harriet remained on guard at the boy's bedside.

"Little Hans," she whispered to him when she saw that he was lying calmly awake, "you must not die. Your mother will die instead."

He believed her. It is so easy to believe that which one ardently wishes to come true. And Little Hans now actually thought it possible for his mother to assume those pains and sufferings of which he was so inexpressibly weary.

"Mother, that is very kind of you," he said with a grateful smile.

But the next moment his eyes were clouded. "Mother, have you, too, seen the city with streets of gold, and the land where there is no suffering?"

She would have answered yes, if only to remove that cloud of doubt, but could not. If she had tried, she knew the boy would have detected the deception.

"I can imagine them," she said, knowing that this was far from what the boy meant; yet it was also far from her former view of life.

Little Hans was silent, as if pondering over his mother's words.

"I had better die and go there first, mother dear," he said. "I know better about all those things. Maybe you wouldn't feel at home up there."

She had no answer. Possibly she would not.

"But are you quite sure *you* will feel at home there?" she asked in return, her mother's heart throbbing violently as she awaited the reply.

Little Hans silently struggled to formulate a clear answer. He was only seven years old, but his sickness and isolation had matured his mind more than is usual in a child.

"Mother," said he gently, "do you remember the time when I was just a little boy? Then when I was very sick I would not let you leave me. It never seemed to hurt quite so bad when I could sit in your lap."

He paused for a moment, as if speaking those few words had exceeded his powers. Meanwhile his mother's heart throbbed violently; she remembered it so well.

"But while I sat in your lap, mother," he went on, "the other boys would come and claim you too, and besides, father came and talked with you for hours and hours, I thought. I wanted you all to myself, but I could not keep you. Though I sat in your lap, you were so far away."

His words gave a pang of agony to the mother's heart. This child who had always been the darling of her heart, how could he say that? Yet, it must be so, it could not be otherwise. Her life had been one of outward activity; she had been too much occupied with externals to live the internal life, to acquaint herself with the soul-life of her boy, whose trend was away from temporal things toward the eternal.

Now she broke violently into tears, bitter tears of regret

for the poverty of her life — so material, so superficial, so meaningless.

Meanwhile Little Hans lay upon his bed of pain, puzzled how to proceed without rending his mother's heart.

"I never cried," he went on at length. "Father said, if I didn't cry, I'd be a real little man, just like my brothers. But I felt so very, very lonesome. Then May came to our house — —"

He paused again. His mother was still sobbing. Why did he say that May *came*, she wondered, for the girl had been in the house from his infancy.

He seemed to read her thoughts, for he said, "Mother, dear little mother, I love you much more than I do May. It is not so much herself as her *Friend* that I love."

His mother was astonished.

"My dear, what do you know about May's friends?" she asked.

"Why, mother, it's her Friend that loves the little children so; it's He that built the wonderful city that you've seen with your mind's eye."

The mother sat silent.

"And you must love Him too," urged the child. "Now I think more of Him than I do of His Holy City and its beautiful surroundings. Mother, are you sorry that I love Him so?"

"No, my boy, not at all," said she.

Then a smile glinted in the eyes of the boy, and he came to the point to which his words had led up.

"Then," said she, "you would not be sorry should my Friend come soon, very soon, and take me away from you?"

"No, no, my dear," faltered the mother.

His dark eyes peered sharply into hers as if sounding the depth of her very soul. Did he know what those words cost her? That the sword was even now piercing her soul?

But when those words had passed her lips a great calm fell upon her struggling soul. The eyes of the boy were filled with tears, but there was a smile in his pallid lips.

"Mother — mother," said he with a show of good cheer, "then my Friend must be yours too."

One experience followed so close upon another, and Harriet was passing from darkness to twilight, and thence into the clear light so rapidly that she hardly knew at this moment what she did and what she did not believe. She was conscious of but one desire — to love that Friend, Him who had everything to give, and without whom her life was, in fact, as empty and poor as she had thought it full and rich.

In her hesitancy the voice failed her, but she bowed her head in answer.

The next moment the mother was on her knees at the bedside, her lips fervently pressed upon the cold forehead of the boy, who in turn weakly clasped his arms about her neck.

"Mother, oh mother!" he whispered in such ecstasy as carried her too, for the moment, beyond the world of

material things. Everything about her was blotted out before her bodily eyes; time and space vanished. These two beings were no longer herself and her sick child — but spirits relieved of mortal shackles, peering beyond the curtain raised for the nonce upon the world unseen. They seemed to her like two flowers, now in bloom, gone to-morrow, — thistle downs wafted on the breeze, — atoms of dust borne away into a world of infinity, — two flickering candle-flames that any gust might put out. And yet, there was something about these two — life, power, an inextinguishable, deathless something — that was no more a part of their physical selves than their bodies were part and parcel of the apparel. It was that something which triumphs over death, the eternal within the perishable, which bore up her poor boy in his dying hours; that, too, which quickened her faint spirit into new life in the very moment when earthy existence held no charm and mortal bonds seemed dissolved.

Harriet had had many profound experiences of the inner life which she was unable to define. They all now seemed to point one way, to be but premonitions of this one supreme moment in life when, down in the dark vale of grief and affliction, she met — *God*.

Little Hans fell into a slumber which released his arms from his mother's neck, softly, imperceptibly. All the while she was in another world, prostrate at the feet of the Great Friend whom her boy had found and to whom he had led her.

Henry had fallen asleep in his chair, utterly exhausted in body and mind. When he opened his eyes and found his wife on her knees and motionless at the bedside, he was instantly aroused. "She is dead — Harriet is dead," was the thought that flashed through his mind. And with her all was lost, that was the stark, dismal certainty before which his own soul almost died within him that instant.

Rising to his feet, he reverently approached the bedside. He raised her upon his arms, — how strong he was to carry so lightly this grand, queenly woman, he commented inwardly as with an expression of infinite tenderness he carried her limp form to a couch in the same room.

When he laid her gently down consciousness returned and the flame of life which seemed extinct burned again. She lay entirely still as he spread a blanket over her, and it was but slowly and with an effort that she regained contact with the material world.

"Thank you, Henry," she said almost inaudibly, and not until she heard her own voice did she fully recover her physical senses.

Henry's wan face grew paler still as with a quick impulse he seized her hand.

"You *live*?" he exclaimed as if doubting his own eyes and ears.

"Yes — Henry — I live," was all she could say.

It was indeed a peculiar kind of life. There lay her son reduced to the mere semblance of life. There stood her husband, near, yet so far away that his voice came like

a sound across broad waters in the gloaming. Her soul was full — whether with sorrow or joy she knew not, only there was a sense of peace, infinite peace.

She knew now that when Little Hans should be taken away the tenderest heartstrings would break, and there would be great pain, but no sorrow — she was through with that. For the eternal light was breaking upon her vision — the dawn of a new life, the prevision of things everlasting.

At this very moment the first ray of the morning sun lit up the pale face of the boy and added its enlivening tint to the wan countenance of the mother.

Little Hans looked at her in surprise. Whence this sudden soul-light in those weary eyes? How had such a buoyant spirit been instilled into a body so faint with fatigue and grief?

Henry Falconer, too, was surprised. But deep within he heard a voice speak the words, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die."

"*Life* — wonderful mystery; *death* — no less a mystery; *love* — greatest mystery of all. We mortals, what do we know?" he mused, and back from his own soul came the answer, "Nothing."

Henry Falconer and his wife had lived in the borderland of the world unseen; their love was the reflection from the realm of light, and in this light they had lived

contented. Mortal love was the only god they had worshiped. Now Harriet had looked beyond the curtain, into the realm of the infinite, that world where God is Love. But Henry had as yet no such experience. He was still in the outer darkness. Yet, to him also things earthly had lost their charm, and his eyes were turned elsewhere. He sought the vision upon which Harriet's eyes were fixed, but in vain. Of the great transformation that was going on within her he saw but the faint outward sign.





XXI.

The Martyr's Deathbed

In the morning Henry persuaded his wife to give herself a few moments of rest. Little Hans had relapsed into a state of lethargy, his pulse-beat giving promise of at best a few more hours of life. Harriet retired to her room and fell asleep almost instantly on her couch. Henry, too, snatched a bit of rest, leaving May to watch at the bedside.

An hour or two of rest after days of weary watching, and the parents were again engaged in the struggle for their child's life. Sitting in tense silence at the bedside, they saw the boy's features again distorted by pain. It was no longer the face of a child, but that of a man, rendered almost unrecognizable by the gathering shadows of death. Terrible hours were these.

After having lain for a while with eyes closed and lips tightly compressed, he opened them suddenly and cast anxious looks about. The mother bent over him to wipe the beads from his agonized brow. Meanwhile the door

opened, and May entered the quiet sick-room and approached the bedside.

She had entered unobserved by Harriet, but Little Hans' roving eyes saw her at once, and lit up with an affectionate glint.

"May," he whispered faintly.

The mother looked up and found the girl by her side. Another might have upbraided her for intruding uncalled at such a moment as this, but Harriet, having caught the glint in the boy's eyes, rose and withdrew, resigning to the girl her place at the deathbed of her own child..

Henry looked with some atonishment at the two women — mostly at the mother who yielded to the nurse. Her love exalted her at this moment — she was grand in his sight. A reflex of that grandeur he recognized in the younger woman, who, dismissing her usual reserve, began to talk of things spiritual with Little Hans in the presence of his parents. What power could give such calm and fortitude at the very moment when Death stands at the threshold?

May spoke too low for Henry to hear, but he noticed that her words calmed and soothed the boy, and that was enough for him to know.

All of a sudden the frail frame of the child was shaken with violent convulsions; his face grew ghastly in its contortions, and he threw his little arms about wildly, as if fighting off invisible antagonists on all sides.

Henry Falconer hid his face in his hands, loath to wit-

ness the awful scene, yet he saw it none the less, breathing hard and trembling the while. Harriet made no outcry, only fixing an agonized stare at her child, while May seized the struggling hands in her own, saying in tones of unforgettable tenderness: "We must pray — there is no other help."

And she prayed in words dictated by her own childlike heart, and with a faith that knew of no doubt, until Little Hans grew calm and lay entirely still. May's great Friend had been called, and He proved indeed a very present help.

There came a mysterious calm over the mother's heart. She felt the nearness of God, His majesty, His wondrous love, and in that moment her heart turned to Him in prayer, as if it were the most natural thing.

She had never prayed before, nor recited prayers, — no one had taught her. Her mother had neglected it; her father had depended on Miss Rose for that part of her Christian training; life and love had failed to teach her to turn to God in need; but now that her heart was full to overflowing with motherly love and compassion, she threw herself upon God's mercy, whispering: "Dear Lord, Thy bosom is our haven — take my child, my Little Hans — he is Thine — Thine he has always been."

Once again in this life the child of sorrow and joy, the sunshine of Sunnycrest, was to smile upon those about him. He opened his eyes with a radiant look for May,

and when his mother leaned over him he whispered just one word —

“Father.”

And his father stepped close to the bedside for the last farewell. He looked deep into his little son's eyes, and saw that they were bright and clear, no shadow now remaining in their depths.

“Thank you, my boy, — my dear Little Hans, — thank you, and good-bye.”

Did Little Hans hear his parting words? Possibly not, yet he met his father's last lingering look into his eyes with a smile of exquisite tenderness. A kiss on the boy's forehead — another — and Henry Falconer withdrew, almost crushed with grief.

Now the mother was to bid the beloved child farewell. There were no words spoken; no tears were shed in that bitter-sweet parting. So Little Hans crossed the threshold of the eternal world, his hand still clinging to that of his mother, while in the little martyr's pale face dawned the light of the life to be.

But a bond had been tied hard and fast between the visible world and the unseen. Little Hans, though dead, yet lived, — there in the fulness of hope attained, here in the tender memory of those left behind.





XXII.

Springtime at Last

The death of Little Hans caused no great outward changes in the daily life of the family. His going had been so long expected ; furthermore, he had for a long time been living almost in a world by himself. That little sphere was now set apart as a sanctuary for father and mother, when Harriet locked the door to Little Hans's room, denying admittance to all others.

In this room Harriet lived through again and again the events and anxieties of the deathbed ; here she heard her child's faint voice, felt his tiny arms about her neck, saw him wing his flight into the radiance of eternity's dawn. This was now the only joy left to her. When compelled to take part in the temporal concerns which placed so great requirements on the mistress of Sunnycrest, she went about her duties listlessly and with utter lack of interest in it all.

As time passed and the memory of Little Hans faded out of people's minds, they levied on Harriet's interest

from all sides. The other boys demanded attention; and Henry craved her love more than ever, yet the warm affection of former days seemed lacking. The kind words, the warm interest, the loving heart for which she had been known, — all seemed to have vanished; and the kindliness which she sought to show seemed forced and unreal. Her heart was not in it. It was still chained to the memory of her boy.

But a change to the better must come. She locked the little sanctuary, and went out in active life again with a firm resolve to make a stronger fight than ever before to better the world around her, as her own life had been regenerated and purified.

O, for the sin, the want, the suffering, the depravity about her!

Sin — aye, that was a new concept in her present sphere of thought. She attended church regularly now, and conceived the highest respect and the deepest sympathy for the man who filled her father's pulpit.

He spoke of *sin* quite as much as old Dean Malm had spoken of *love*. He saw clearly the trail of the Evil One in the world, the bonds that held men captive, the vices that corrupted their souls, and he called it all by its right name — sin. And in his fight for the souls of men, for regeneration and reclamation, he had no more energetic assistant in the parish than the mistress of Sunnycrest.

The parish, however, proved as obdurate as ever, and his efforts were no more successful than had been those of

the old parson in the earlier years of his pastorate. His knocking at the doors of the people's hearts and consciences proved as futile as though they were walls of rock or gates of brass.

Eventually the pastor grew weary of the task and left. A number of well recommended men applied in due form for the place made vacant, for the parish, such as it was, had grown very prosperous in material things.

All these were rejected, and the parish finally issued a unanimous call to the Rev. Axel Malm, son of Dean Malm. On that day Harriet realized that her father's labors in this field had not been in vain; that without his efforts Henry Falconer and she herself would not have succeeded as they did and even might have failed.

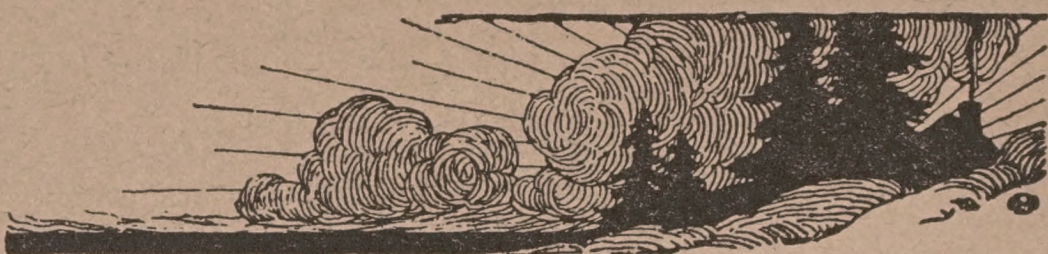
It was a great day in the annals of the parish when Pastor Axel Malm was called to the rectory. All faces shone with joy as the people left the church, and when Henry and Harriet came to visit the graves where slept Little Hans beside the great Hans, his grandfather, and he beside his beloved Magnhild, they found to their surprise and pleasure that the three graves were covered with flowers.

And as they stood there gazing through tears of gratitude at the floral tribute, these same peasants whose hard hearts the previous pastor had been unable to budge came, one by one, their wives at their sides, and pressed the hands of Harriet and Henry with unfeigned cordiality. There was tender light in every eye. Had Magnhild stood there

now, she could have pointed to face after face and said, "Look — look, I knew that the ice would melt, and spring would come at last."

Henry and Harriet walked home in silence. After this — what was to follow?





XXIII.

“The Greatest of These Is Love”

The Sunday when Axel Malm was to preach his first sermon in his home church was a bright autumn day with a clear blue sky above all the wealth of nature's colors glowing in the sun. People started for church early and as they approached from all points it seemed as though every one would attend services that morning, whatever distance he had to travel.

On a day like this the peasant folk in holiday attire had no ear for the mocking laughter of the Lady of the Woods, — they heard but the peculiar solemnity in the ringing of the church bells. There was a joyousness in their chimes that seemed a reecho from the happy and expectant hearts of the worshipers.

The face of Pastor Axel Malm was radiant with an inner light as he looked out over the great congregation from his father's pulpit. These were the people his father and mother had loved; among them he was to labor;

this was the flock for which he was to render account on the great day of reckoning. Such were the thoughts that stirred within him at that moment, and he realized his responsibility to the full.

And as he bowed his head in silent prayer before beginning his sermon, he heard a voice in his heart whisper the words once spoken to the prophet Daniel:

"O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong." Axel Malm felt himself strengthened, and his heart answered, "Let my lord speak; for thou has strengthened me."

When he began to speak, the people all felt that he was one of them, for he spoke of their life, their sufferings, their strife and need, as one who feels for those bending under their burdens. Every heart recognized its own travail; all owned that the preacher's description of their besetting sins and pet transgressions was true. Those steeped in vice were obliged to admit that they fell deeper every time they fell; the greedy, that their hearts grew ever harder as they hoarded their pelf. He was the son of old Parson Malm, he knew their needs as had his father before him. That very thing gave him an instant grip on these people's hearts.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" — these were the words which led up to the application. There was an end of the description of the darkness, the sinfulness, the bonds, the hopelessness of this life, and the gates of the kingdom of God

were thrown ajar; now condemnation ceased, for with Christ Jesus coming into the sermon the gospel of mercy was held out to all who would accept. At the close he put all his heart into the mighty appeal of the Saviour, "Come unto me." — "Come, you who hunger, you who thirst, you who weep, you who labor and are heavy-laden, come, all, come unto Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

He paused an instant to let the appeal sink into the hearts of the hearers, then closed with the gentle invitation, as if coming from them, "Lord, abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

The people had come to church in a festive mood; not one of them but returned home with heart touched by the solemnity of the day. While homeward bound and all through the following week of toil many a parishioner found his thoughts running in new channels.

Harriet was probably the one most profoundly impressed. While her brother spoke she drank in every word, as the thirsty ground absorbs the raindrops after a long drouth.

When at the conclusion of the services she stepped out into the bright sunshine, the picture of the Son of Man was still before her; she saw His majesty and purity as never before; meanwhile every beam of sunlight, every flower, every tree decked in the colorful garb of autumn, seemed a messenger proclaiming God's mercy and loving kindness. She felt that in her own nothingness His abounding love and grace made her truly rich and happy.

The grave of Little Hans was remembered that day, as always, but not with flowers. As she stood beside the little mound, she felt the hope of eternal life springing up in her breast, a hope greater than that which lay buried under the sod. It became clear to her then and there that his memory, however sacred, was not the greatest thing in her life. The Friend that Little Hans had spoken of was now her Friend indeed; he had been the guide pointing her to the gateway of the kingdom of God, — how could she but enter?

* * *

These were remarkable days for the mistress of Sunnycrest — spring days in the midst of autumnal dormancy and death.

She made frequent evening visits to the parsonage, confiding her spiritual experience to her brother, who understood her so well. She came to him like a beam of light from another world. It was not the same death-weary woman, on her regular evening visit to the churchyard; it was a new, a regenerated soul that now came on angel visits to his home.

Her brother saw and marveled. His had been a long, dismal way, full of doubt and struggle, before the scales fell from his eyes and he was given to see the true Light. To him, therefore, it was unbelievable, a very miracle, that his sister had so quickly turned from material to spiritual things.

Harriet Falconer had been very happy in the posses-

sion of worldly blessings, and rich in the affection of her husband and the love of her children; but when the riches and glory of the mystery of the Christ-life was made manifest to her, she counted all else a loss until that had been gained. Little Hans had truly been the messenger of "love and life." Dean Malm's prediction had now come true: the boy was indeed to her a child of sorrow and joy — profound sorrow, in truth, but in the end consummate joy.

* * *

Axel Malm and his sister took a sleigh ride to the country over the fine roads after the first snowfall. The minister did his own driving, and brother and sister sat together in such close intimacy as they had never known before. It was the intimacy of silence mostly, their hearts and minds being so bound up in common interests that there was little need of speech.

Harriet suddenly broke the silence.

"Tell me, Axel, how did you find your former charge?"

"Well, there's not much to say; you know the outcome," he replied.

"Yes, I know that, but I should like to hear something about the start — let me call it the springtime — the breaking of the ground," she pursued.

After a moment's thought, he went on:

"Springtime, you say. That's the word. But where shall I begin, for, do you know, it has always been springtime to me. I was always filled with the joy of living,

ever since I can remember. All the things I cherished, the beautiful, the true, — these I now prize more highly still. All are glorified by faith in God. But there was a time when I did not discern that glory; about the time I visited Sunnycrest and heard you and Henry sing your song of praise to Love. That affected me a little, but I was still more moved by the change I discovered in father. It was but natural that two young persons should be happy in the springtime of their mutual affection, but to see new life spring into being in an old man — there was the real miracle. For ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’

“Upon his advice I took up studies for the ministry. I cherished the hope that in theology I might find the solution to the problem of life which I had sought in vain in philosophy. I found light, in a small measure, ’tis true, but *light* nonetheless.

“With that divine ray shining before my mind’s eye, I was ordained and accepted a charge in the backwoods away to northward. This I did in the full confidence that if this light was of God, it would grow clearer to me, and would make others see as well. Far from home and friends, yet I was very happy. My music was the song of the primeval forest; my books were the plain people among whom I lived, and their love was my joy.

“That was music far beyond anything I had yet heard; those living books were a greater study than any learned tome in the university library. I had come as a teacher; but I learnt more while there than during all my

years of study. Among those simple, God-fearing people I learnt to know what true Christianity is. I began to see the difference between life and doctrine, between the letter and the Spirit.

“You can readily understand how I enjoyed life in this new environment. And yet, when the call came from here, I could hardly contain myself for joy, for, after all, what place was ever like home.”

The answer was complete.

They rode on in silent contemplation.

* * *

Two years later there was an added feature in the celebration of the Christmas holidays at Sunnycrest — the ceremony by which May, the nurse and teacher of Little Hans, became the wife of Pastor Axel Malm. Thus she was to return as mistress to the parsonage which to her, as servant, had become the most beloved spot on earth. Not until she came there had she begun to live, it seemed to her, and now that she was to be the soul of that cherished manse, her cup of happiness was full to overflowing.

Harriet and Henry were standing side by side at the window, looking out over the light-spangled town below, and up to the starlit vault above. Their hearts, too, were full that night.

At the close of the festivity, the bridegroom himself conducted the evening devotional, reading with glowing heart the Apostle's words on human and divine love, as addressed to the faithful in the city of Corinth: —

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.

"And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

"And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

"Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.

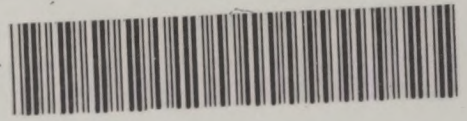
"For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then

face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known.

“But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”



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